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The Boy Clown: OR, THE QUEEN of the ARENA.

A Romance of Real Life in a
Traveling Circus.

BY FRANK S. FINN.

CHAPTER I.

A FALL FROM THE TRAPEZE.

THE village of Frenchville was in a fever of excitement. The good people woke up suddenly one morning to find barns, sheds, stables and every available portion of the village covered with huge posters and flaring pictures, announcing that

"COPENHAGEN'S
MAMMOTH CIRCUS
AND MORAL MENAGERIE!"

was coming. To the Frenchvillers this was an excitement, and long did they gaze at the cuts of the sylph-like beings who almost seemed to float through the air, or dance like feathers rustled by the wind. How the mouths of the youngsters did expand, and to what an extent were their eyes opened at the monster pictorial of the daring man who was rash enough to place himself in the den of lions, and feed these denizens of the forest with raw meat. It was almost as good as the show itself to see those youngsters stare.

Older heads were not exempt from this fever. Although the shopkeepers thought it was wrong for a show to come and take all the money out of the place and make their business bad, yet they were going with the rest of creation, and their families were going along with them. It wasn't every day a circus was to be seen, and when the chance *did* occur it was thought best to improve it.

The long-wished for day came at last, and the troupe entered Frenchville in magnificent style. They strove to hide their jaded looks caused by a hard night's travel over a rocky road, where the jolting of the teams was anything but conducive to sleep. The cavalcade was very imposing, representing as it did scenes in history; and the glittering armor, polished helmets and battle axes shone in the sun, fairly dazzling the eyes that gazed upon them.

Among the members of that company was a youth of some fourteen summers. Almost too handsome were his features for a boy, while his form was one which many a sculptor would have been proud of for a model. Dressed in the fine, tight-fitting suit of a page, and riding his horse easily and gracefully, he was the most observed of all the artists. He seemed born to the saddle, and to have such gentle yet firm control over his horse, that it kept splendid time to the music of the brass band.

This lad's name was Henry Needhurst, but, upon the bills, he was announced as Henri De La Forest. His grandfather, father and mother, all had been circus-performers in their day, and it was but natural that he should follow in their footsteps. As a ring equestrian, he was not a wonder, and yet, as we have said, in the street procession he achieved great triumphs. His *forte* was that of a gymnast, acrobat and trapeze performer, and never a better appeared in the sawdust ring. A fearlessness in his acts charmed and held spell-bound all his audience. So much for an introduction to our hero, whose adventures we are about to detail.

The procession wound its way through the village until it came to the lot upon which the tent was pitched.

The performers went to their dressing-rooms to doff their clothes. While Henry was putting on his coat, a young man, the juggler of the troupe, approaching and tapping him on the shoulder, whispered:

"Come outside. I have something to tell you."

The boy finished his toilet, and, taking his friend's arm, they sallied forth into the street.

"Well, Charley," said Henry, "and what is it that is so important and which cannot be spoken aloud?"

"Perhaps you think me foolish, but I would advise you to keep a sharp look-out for Murker."

"Why, what's the matter with him?"

"Some one has told the boss of his being drunk the other night, and he swears it was you, and that he'll come up with you some time."

"It looks very likely that I should tell of him when I saved him from being thrown off the cart and dashed to pieces."

"So I tell him, but he will not be convinced."

"I've no grudge against Murker, and I've urged him often enough to reform, but he has so often called me a temperance twaddler that of late I have desisted."

"Well, remember I have warned you. By the way, who puts up the trapeze you perform on?"

"Murker, of course."

"Then I caution you not to go through your act until you have tried every rope and bar of it. Murker means mischief, and you will find it out if you are not careful."

They had now arrived at their hotel, and dinner being ready the two went to the table and the conversation was forgotten.

This Murker was a man who had changed his occupation every little while, and had wandered from one city to another until he had come across the circus and applied for work and was accepted. Drink was his greatest enemy, and had caused him many a discharge from other places. He was a driver of one of the caravan cages, and it was but a night or two previous that he had taken more liquor than was good for him, and, forgetting where he was, he let the reins loose from his hands and would have fallen to the ground had not Henry caught him. The next day the manager heard of Murker's fit, and gave him notice to leave when his week was up.

Murker never stopped to inquire *who* was the informer, but, jumping at the conclusion that it was Henry, vowed vengeance upon the lad, and fearfully and terribly was it carried out!

On the same day that Henry and Charles held their conversation, this Murker was putting up and arranging the cages, and gave vent to the following sentence, heard only by himself:

"Master Henry thinks himself a paragon of goodness, does he? Maybe he considers himself handsome, and that nobody has so good a form as he? Wouldn't I like to have him here and put him in this tiger's cage! I reckon *that* would spoil his beauty for him. He'd look nice with his face all mangled and bloody! But, I know a plan worth two of that. Put him in this cage and he'd not live long, but the other way he'll not only live but suffer. And I'll do it, too.

The man or boy who thwarts me shall not go unpunished. I'll play the saint with him and throw him off his guard. My act accomplished, then hey for California! The people of Frenchville will see a performance not in the bills. Where will their graceful and agile gymnast be? Henry Needhurst, better had you been coiled in the embrace of one of the cobras than turned informer on Archibald Murker!"

Another person approaching him, and drawing him into a conversation, brought his soliloquy to an end. Had Henry heard the remarks we have noted down, he would have gone to his duty with less lightness of spirit, and been more cautious in his proceedings. The afternoon exhibition took place without anything happening, and, by the time Henry was dressing for the evening, the warning of his friend Charles had entirely passed from his mind.

At that evening's performance it would seem as if every village within ten miles of Frenchville had emptied itself for the purpose of witnessing the circus.

Henry's grand act took place at nine o'clock, and about half an hour before that time Murker began preparing the ropes and bars upon which the young athlete was to perform.

Most, if not all, of my readers have attended the circus once, if not oftener, during their lives, and will remember that beautiful and graceful, though dangerous part of the performance called the trapeze act, where the performer goes through many wonderful evolutions suspended in mid-air by means of these ropes and bars.

The person whose duty it is to superintend the arrangement of the apparatus, who is to see that the ropes are strong and safe, that all pins are driven firmly, and knots tied securely, has a great responsibility, for he literally holds the life of the actor in his hand. Murker knew this only too well, and a close observer might have seen a devilish smile playing upon his coarse features as he began his preparations.

For a few moments only was he busy straightening the cords and arranging the various pulleys, but even in that short time the fiendish work was done.

Close down to one of the blocks through which the supporting tackle was rove he applied the keen edge of a small knife which he held concealed in his hand, nearly severing the rope. A single strand alone remained, strong enough to bear the mere weight of the young athlete, but which would be sure to give way when the violent evolutions, such as swinging or jumping from the upper to the lower bar, began.

At length the ring master announced the "celebrated trapeze act, by Mr. Henri De La Forest," and Henry came bounding into the ring, his fair young face all aflush with the excitement of the moment.

A deafening shout of applause greeted him, which he acknowledged by a graceful bow, and then, grasping the pendent line, he drew himself up, hand over-hand, to the cross bar, upon which he seated himself. Then began those truly wonderful feats that had gained him such well-deserved renown.

Now swinging by his hands, then whirling over and over with amazing rapidity, then again letting go all holds, he appeared to be falling headlong to the earth, but suddenly catching his toes upon the bar, he swung, head downward, from the giddy height.

Still the frail strand held, and darker and darker grew the brow of the assassin, Murker, as, from a secluded spot, he watched the performance, cursing himself that he had not cut deeper into the rope. Round after round of applause had greeted each difficult act of the daring athlete, and now he prepares for the last and most dangerous of all.

He is to drop from the upper bar upon the lower, catching as before upon his toes, but this time while being swung back and forth the full limit of the ropes.

The assistant below grasps the cord that Henry has fastened to the bar and thrown down to him, and with a strong arm he swings the trapeze back and forth, each time causing it to make a wider sweep.

Calmly and with folded arms, the young actor sits upon the upper bar, waiting for the proper moment to make the dangerous leap.

Not a sound is heard throughout that vast audience, as, leaning forward, they gaze with all-absorbing interest upon the scene.

Suddenly, quick as a flash of light, the agile form is seen to dart downward, perform an evolution in mid-air, and then the firmly-set toes catch upon the bar and arrest the fearful fall. But only for an instant. Even as the shout of applause is hovering upon the lips of thousands, ready for utterance, it is changed to a cry of horror that is heard and taken up by those upon the outside.

A quick, sharp snap is heard, the level bar upon which the feet rest tilts upon one side, and then, as though thrown from some powerful engine, the boy athlete is hurled outward and downward to the earth.

Screams rent the air. Women fainted. The employees and performers rushed into the ring and took the body up to carry it to the dressing-room. The performance was not allowed to proceed. Henry was a favorite with all, and tears gathered in many an eye as they grouped around that form lying so cold and still.

"Dead! dead!" wailed several of the women.

But, there was one who not only said "Dead," but added, "Mercilessly murdered!"

CHAPTER II.

JESSIE, THE WANDERER.

AFTER Murker had accomplished his vengeance, he slid down from his perch and made his way as fast as he could through the streets of the village until he arrived at a lonesome and dreary part of it, where he saw a small cabin erected, and from which the smoke was seen issuing. Here he paused, undecided whether to ask for admittance or continue on until he had separated himself many a mile from the circus; for he

well knew that retribution would overtake him were he caught, as he alone would be held responsible for the breaking of the rope.

"Little chance of their finding me here, I reckon," thought he; "they'll be off to-night, and I can easily escape to-morrow. No one saw me do it, but there'll be enough to suspect I had a hand in it, and suspicion is proof too often. I'll try this place, at all events, and if refused shelter, I can but go elsewhere."

Carrying his plan into execution, he gave a loud rap at the door.

A girl of about fourteen years of age opened it. This girl, although dressed in the coarsest of raiment, was very lovely. Her hair, which was inky black, fell in massive waves down her neck. Murker was astonished at seeing so beautiful a being in so homely a hovel.

The girl ushered Murker into the kitchen, and offered him a chair. Although it was a summer's night, there was a fire in the little cooking-stove, and there was a pot upon it from which came a scent as though herbs were cooking. The room was very poorly furnished, and the floor much worn in many places. The only occupant of this room, as the man and girl entered it, was a decrepit old woman who was spinning, and crooning some old song. As the stranger entered, the woman looked up as if wondering what his errand could be at that time of night.

"Grandmother is very deaf, sir, and you will either have to tell me your message or speak very loud to her," said the girl.

"Jessie! what are you talking with that strange man for? What is his business?" asked the old woman.

Murker told the girl he desired a place to stop during the night, and asked if he could be accommodated there. Jessie repeated this to her grandmother, and, although the old lady was at first reluctant to accede to the request, she was finally overruled in her objections by the sight of the dollar which he offered in payment.

Murker at once made himself at home, and fell to talking with the old crone, while the girl, Jessie, busied herself about the room, singing to herself in a low tone while so engaged.

Her voice was very sweet, and at once caught the ear of the visitor, who, from having heard so much singing in his circus life, was a more than ordinary judge of what was good or bad.

For a few minutes he listened in silence to Jessie, who was all unconscious of his admiration, and then suddenly turning to her, he said:

"Come, birdie, you have a rare voice. Give me a song, and perhaps I can find the mate of the piece I gave your grandame for you."

Jessie at first hung back, but presently overcoming her timidity, she sang the plaintive ballad of "Auld Robin Gray," with rare sweetness and good taste.

At the conclusion, Murker applauded loudly, and then, as if struck with a sudden idea, he muttered, under his breath:

"By Jove! this is a prize! Let me but manage to get this girl in my possession and my fortune is made. Then for a life of frolic and fun, with plenty of money in my pocket, and liquor in abundance whenever I've a mind to, and no questions asked. It's worth the trial, anyhow."

As if the fates were plotting against the innocent girl and in favor of the villain, the old hag began a series of complaints about the hard times, and the difficulty she had in feeding two mouths.

"And now," she continued, "my darter Melissy Ann's a-comin' to live along with me, and there'll be three 'stead of two to look arter. And then, you see, sir, though Jessie calls me grandma, and thinks she is my gran'darter, she ain't neither kith nor kin to me. Thirteen years ago, she was left at my door, and ever since I've had the rheumatiz she's been rale good to me. But, I don't see no way of keepin' her longer 'n a week more, and then she'll have to scratch for herself."

In this manner the old crone went on grumbling, until at length Murker spoke:

"My good woman," said he, "I have a plan by which I can take her off your hands, if you will consent."

"Why, what on yearth would you be wantin' of the gal?" cried the old hag.

"Never you mind. She shall come to no harm. She shall dress like a lady, and be one, too," and then, as if thinking he had better explain, he continued:

"I will have her taught to be a great singer. Come, now, what say you? I will give you twenty bright new dollars, and take her off your hands. Shall it be a bargain?"

"Twenty dollars! That's a heap of money, and I'd never want for snuff or 'baccy. Twenty dollars!"

And thus, despite the tears and entreaties of the helpless girl, the cruel bargain was completed.

"Will you, can you, grandmother, send me away with this man, of whom you know nothing?" she asked, with tears streaming down her face.

But the sight of the clinking coin was too much for the old woman. She clutched the money in her skinny fingers, and turned a deaf ear to the girl's prayers.

"Then hear what I have to say," said Jessie, no longer weeping, but with her eyes flashing with anger and determination. "I will not go with this man! I would far rather beg upon the highway than place myself in his power!"

"Hullo! young miss! I reckon you'll stop that nonsense when once you go with me!" exclaimed Murker, coarsely.

"Perhaps I may when I do go with you, but that time will never come," answered the high-spirited young girl.

Without paying further attention to Jessie, Murker turned to the old woman.

"A bargain is a bargain," he said. "You've got your money, and I take my chance of getting the girl. Where are her things? I'll just fix them up in a bundle handy to carry."

"The gal's things are in that closet. 'Tain't much she's got, but they're all in thar."

Murker opened the door indicated, and went into the closet, when, quick as thought, Jessie banged the door upon him, and locked it, taking the key with her.

This done, she rushed from the hut, and fled away, she scarce knew or cared whither; so that she escaped from the power of the villain she so much feared.

Where to go she knew not. She possessed not a friend, even an acquaintance, other than the old woman with whom she had so long lived, in the whole world. But, with a brave heart, she pressed forward, until, at length, utterly wearied out, she was on the point of seeking a spot by the roadside where she could sleep, when she saw a number of wagons, drawn by horses, approaching.

Here, at least, she thought she might obtain shelter and protection, and so waited until they had come up.

In the meanwhile, Murker, when he found himself so cleverly caught in a trap, rapped and battered away at the door, calling, with many an oath, upon the old woman to let him out.

But even had she been able to have reached the closet door she could have afforded no assistance, for it will be remembered that Jessie had taken the key, and Murker, getting desperate, threw his weight against it, and burst the fastenings.

With an oath he rushed from the place, but had just passed into the larger room, when a well-directed blow, dealt by some unseen hand, felled him to the floor.

CHAPTER III.

A NIGHT ON THE ROAD.

BUT Henry was not dead, although life was held by the thinnest fiber, and it was some time before he opened his eyes to stare upon a horror-struck crowd gathered around, and gazing on him. He strove to move, but it gave him agony to do so, and, as they endeavored to lift him up, a piercing scream came from him, that penetrated the hearts of those around.

Many a prayer went up in petition for that lad's life, and they were heard and answered.

"Ah, Mary!" said one of the women, "there are many who believe that people in our profession never think of a higher and better world than this. And I've even seen in a magazine that the performers in a circus are called ignorant and degraded."

"Well, well, Sallie, let them talk. I believe, and I know you do too, that we have as near a right to heaven as they," answered another.

"Whoever did this awful deed—for we have found where the rope is cut—deserves to swing for it. It's next to a miracle that Henry wasn't killed outright. I don't see what saved him, falling, as he did, from so great a height."

"Yes, it was, indeed, next to a miracle," the woman said. "By some chance or other the carpet, generally laid in the ring for 'ground and lofty tumbling' had not been taken up, and this, in a measure, thwarted a villain's plans."

The physician of the village arrived in

good time; and after a great deal of flourishes and asking of questions not applicable to the subject, proceeded to examine his patient, whom he pronounced to be badly, though not dangerously hurt. At first he looked upon the proposition of the lad's going on with the troupe as utterly impracticable. But when he was told that there were skillful nurses who would care for him, he finally gave his consent, and preparations were at once begun to render the journey as easy as possible.

A large feather-bed was placed in one of the smoothest-going wagons, a careful driver was detailed, and the wounded boy's friend, Charles, assumed the duty of watcher and nurse by his side.

Everything possible was done, and then the troupe started on their night journey.

The distance to the next town or "station," where they had to perform on the following day, was some five-and-twenty miles, and as they had got a late start, it required steady driving, so as to be up in time for the "grand *entree*," which, by many of the country people, is considered the best part of the show.

The country over which the caravan was passing was fortunately level, and possessed good roads, though much of the way led through dense forests, where, beneath the over-arching trees, the darkness was very deep.

The procession was passing through one of these woods, when, suddenly, the leaders of the first van shied violently at something on the roadside, and refused to advance, the while snorting violently.

The driver leaped quickly to the ground, having given the reins to his companion, and cautiously advanced toward an object he faintly discerned crouching at the foot of a large tree.

A moment after he was bending over the form of Jessie, who, almost fainting with fatigue, had sunk to the earth just as the wagon came up.

"Why, bless me; what have we here?" exclaimed the man, raising her in his arms.

In a few words, broken by sobs, Jessie told her story, and, in a timid voice, asked for protection.

"And that you shall have, little one," replied the kind-hearted man. "The villain, to drive a poor girl from her home. By Jinks! she sha'n't go back to the old hag if I can prevent it. She's handsome enough, as far as I can see, to make a picture in the procession, and I'll bet the manager 'll be glad of the chance. I'll see."

This he accordingly did, and the manager, with a quick eye to business, saw that it would prove a good speculation, and at once gave his consent.

The women were awakened, and Jessie was given in their charge, and she, having gone through such unusual fatigue and excitement, was soon buried in profound slumber, while the long train moved on through the silent forest toward its destination.

As the night grew older a bank of black, angry-looking clouds loomed up in the West, and presently the low muttering of

thunder came borne upon the freshening breeze.

"Old Jake," the man who had first discovered Jessie, and afterward persuaded the manager to take her along with the troupe, predicted a storm, and no light one, before morning.

Jake was one of the "characters" of the company, an odd but kind-hearted man, and was universally liked and respected by his associates. He always had a good story to tell to pass away a tedious hour, and a willing heart to assist any one who might be in distress.

"This 'ere have been a night of adventure," he said, "and I misses my guess if something more out of the usual don't happen afore we gets to next station. You see three is allus a lucky or onlucky number, as the case may be; and when two things, out of the usual, you know, happens in one night, or day either, thar's sartin to be another to make up the third. Now there's that boy Henry, God bless him, and Old Nick take the villain Mu—but I won't mention no names—he comes first. Then there's the gal we picked up—she comes second; and, mark what I says, there'll be somethin' else afore mornin'. What a row there'll be among the animals when this storm breaks. They don't like thunder and lightnin'."

The rain falling in huge drops put a stop to his joking.

The storm was coming with all its fury, and, ere long, the rain poured down in a perfect deluge! Lightning flashed and played around the caravan, making the party look like witches springing from the darkness of that inky black night. The thunder was heavy and frightful to hear.

The animals, maddened by the sounds of the tempest outside, walked up and down the limits of their cage, howling and lashing their tails in rage at being thus confined.

The women huddled together, and at every glare of lightning, peal of thunder, or cry of the infuriated beasts, would cower down and tremble.

The men worked with all their power to get their poor horses along, but, even these animals had given way to fear.

And yet, through all this fearful din, the young gymnast lay dreaming sweet dreams of other days, while his watcher kept his vigil silently, well knowing that, should his patient awake and find him absent from his post, it would sorely grieve him.

One of the women woke Jessie up and asked her how she could sleep in such a tempest, but the girl said she was used to storms, and that she loved to hear the thunder, for it lulled her to sleep, and many a night had she laid in a cave by the sea listening to its wild music.

They thought she was a strange child, and trembled again as the lightning illuminated the sky.

Fiercer and fiercer raged the storm. Faces and forms were undistinguishable, save when revealed by the lightning, and then only shown to be hidden again in the black pall of the night.

Still, through all, the caravan toiled slowly

along. There was no time to halt, for there was a duty to perform, and they must perform it or entail heavy loss upon the manager.

While the storm was at its very height, the train, leaving the open country over which it had been passing for some time, again entered the forest, at the foot of a long hill, over which the road wound.

The wearied horses toiled painfully up the steep grade, and at length reached the level summit, where a halt was called to allow of a momentary rest before commencing the almost equally difficult descent upon the other side.

Upon either side of the road the tall forest trees lifted their heads, their long arms reaching far out over the road, in some places meeting and interlacing one with the other.

It was in such a place that the vans containing the animals were halted.

If the storm was violent in the valley below, it was found to be much more so upon the summit of the ridge, where the wind, having full sweep, roared and crashed amid the timber with fearful fury.

"Whew! what a night! And just listen to them animiles," said old Jake, as he crouched upon the box and drew his waterproof more closely about his person.

He certainly had cause for the last remark.

Even above the din of thunder, as peal after peal, with hardly an instant's intermission, rolled from out the blacked space above, the horrid yells and screeches of the animals, well-nigh maddened with terror, could be heard.

"I don't like the looks of that tree yonder," said Jake, pointing to an enormous oak, whose leafless branches, seen by a lightning-flash, told of the decay that was sapping its strength.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before a blinding flash, instantly followed by a report like that of a heavy piece of ordnance discharged close by, told the watchers that the bolt had struck in their immediate vicinity.

"Great Heavens! See there!" shouted the watchful old man, pointing, wildly, toward the dead oak.

A quick, sharp snapping of seasoned wood was heard, a louder crash, and then they saw, by the fitful gleam of the lightning, the great tree rushing earthward, and directly across the panther's cage, that unfortunately stood in its path.

With a deafening roar, the mighty tree struck the earth, but, fortunately, only the near end of the van was touched, but this was cut off almost as smoothly as though it had been done with ax and saw.

The panther, a huge and exceedingly fierce animal of its kind, finding itself at liberty by the destruction of its cage, although sorely frightened, sprung from the opening, and, with a roar of mingled terror and delight, bounded away into the surrounding darkness.

The situation now became frightful, and the alarm spread rapidly along the line. The animal was known to be exceedingly fierce, and it might reasonably be expected

that it would soon recover from its momentary fright and attack whatever might chance to attract its hungry gaze.

Besides this the other animals, especially the large tiger and cage of lions, already maddened by the storm, had, on hearing the peculiar yell of the panther as he found himself free, become entirely uncontrollable, and were using every effort to force their dens.

Such firearms as were in the company were quickly produced, and the men distributed along the line of wagons to prevent an attack upon the horses until the broken van could be put in condition to be taken forward.

Old Jake and his "pardner" were standing beside their van, the former holding a cocked pistol in his hand, talking over the singular event that had just transpired.

"You see how it is. I knowed that the third thing was bound to happen, and now—" Then abruptly pausing, as though struck by a sudden thought, he as suddenly exclaimed:

"Great Heavens! the boy! He is wounded and bleedin' yet, it may be, and that beast will scent him a mile off. Stay here, Ned; I must see to this!" and, without pausing further, the brave old fellow ran rapidly back to where the canvas covered wagon that contained Henry had halted, directly beneath a wide-spreading tree, whose thick branches served in some manner to shelter it from the driving rain.

As he approached the spot, a broad glare of lightning momentarily lit up the scene, and, instinctively glancing up into the dense foliage, overhead, he beheld a sight that almost petrified him with horror.

In that brief moment while the lightning lasted, he saw the panther crouched upon a limb directly above the canvas-covered wagon, and just in the act of making his spring!

Quick as thought he leveled his pistol, and waited for the next flash so as to make certain of his aim.

A moment later it came, blinding in its intense brightness, and, as once before that night accompanied by a crash of thunder so powerfully loud that he was stunned for an instant.

He saw the bright bolt as it leaped from the bosom of the black cloud, and darting downward with inconceivable rapidity, bury itself amid the dense foliage of the tree-top near which he stood. He heard the rending of splintered wood, and instantly, thereafter, a dark object was hurled downward, striking the earth almost at his very feet.

It was the dead body of the panther, killed by the lightning which had struck the tree!

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOY CLOWN AND THE QUEEN OF THE ARENA.

A YEAR had now elapsed since the incidents in the last chapter occurred. Time has brought its changes to our group of characters.

Again the scene of our story is in the arena, where the crashing of the band, more noisy than melodious, the clapping of hands,

the shoutings and bravos, prove that a triumph has been achieved. A young girl has gone through the ordeal of a first appearance in the ring, as an equestrienne, and has passed it, nobly.

"What beauty, grace and elegance she has!" is the exclamation of one and all.

Behind that curtain of rough canvas stood one whom the fair young debutante was more anxious to please than the crowded assembly, and, when he clasped her hands, and told her that she was, indeed, the Queen of the Arena, a brighter color glowed on her cheek, and a more powerful beauty passed over her countenance.

"Ah! Henry," exclaimed the girl, "this night, to me, has long been a dreaded one. Who could have guessed that, a year ago to-night, I should now be a member of this troupe, and that you would be the first one to congratulate me on my triumph?"

"You know not how happy it makes me to do so, dear Jessie," replied our hero, with a bright smile and heightened color.

"How strange, how very strange it all seems," said the young girl, musingly. "This night, one year ago, they took me from the roadside, a wanderer without home or friends. And now I have both, and am so happy."

"God grant you may ever be so," said the Boy Clown, for he was now dressed in the points and bells, his remarkable talent in that line having been discovered and quickly developed by the shrewd manager.

Besides, Henry had taken a strong dislike to the trapeze since that eventful night when the villain, Murker, had sent him to the earth, crushed and bleeding, and so it fell out that the change was a very agreeable one to the young performer.

"Oh! was not that a terrible night, that of the storm, when the panther got loose?" continued Jessie. "And to think how narrowly you escaped, for your old friend Jake says that a moment more and the fierce beast would have torn his way through the canvas covering," and the girl shuddered at the memory.

"Truly, I was in the hands of a good Providence that night," replied the Boy Clown.

The snapping of the ring-master's whip, and the call from his voice of "This way, Mr. Merryman," here interrupted the conversation, and Master Henry, popping his head from the opening of the canvas, exclaims:

"Do you want the whole of me, or only my brains, which I notice you are sadly in need of?" The audience stamp and shout, and yell with delight.

"Well, Mr. Ring-master, here I am; and now what do you want of me?"

"I desire you to try to make a fool of yourself."

"You had better do it. You wouldn't have to try at all."

"What's that you say, sir?" with a snap of the whip.

"I was merely remarking that I knew of a young lady who would like to have you for a husband very much."

"How's that?"

"Oh! I offered myself to her once, and

she refused, on the grounds that she had registered an oath on the dictionary that she wasn't going to marry until she had seen the biggest dunce in the country."

"Well, sir, and do you mean to imply that I am that dunce?"

"Can't say, precisely; only the other day, you told me to go to the dence, and then wanted to know why I didn't come to you when you called."

"You are an aggravating youngster, and your sauciness nearly drives me out of my senses."

"That's a very short drive, and wouldn't require a very fast horse to go it with."

"I tell you what it is, if you use any more of your insults, I'll swallow you alive."

"You can't do it."

"Can't? And why not, pray?"

"I'd hold on to your mustache as I was going down, and try to save myself."

"I'll shave it off."

"Then I suppose I must yield to fate; but it will be a benefit to you."

"How so?"

"Why, you'd have more brains in your stomach than you ever had in your head."

It takes but little to make a country audience laugh, and, if the clown can but get the best of the ring-master, he is pretty sure of being successful.

Another rider now came on the scene, and every one's gaze was riveted upon him, for he was performing the scene of the "Wild Indian"—a performance which almost always is a "sure card" with the circus fraternity.

While this act was being gone through with, Henry had a chance to look around the vast gathering, and he endeavored to see if there were any faces familiar to him. There *was* one he knew too well, and, for a moment, the sight almost took away his breath.

It was Murker!

He was there for no good, evidently. Yet, was it not akin to putting his neck into a halter to thus place himself in Henry's power?

But, Murker had not come unprepared to make good his cause. No one had seen him cut the rope on that fearful night; only positive proof could convict him, and that they did not have.

But the performance is progressing, and Murker's eyes are fixed steadfastly on Jessie, who is again in the ring, leaping over banners, flying like a spirit of the air, and then sitting on her noble steed, while gracefully acknowledging the applause so lavishly bestowed upon her.

The entire act over, the Boy Clown is again at his part, jesting and joking, and remarking on the topics of the day, sometimes in rather a caustic manner, but his hits are well made, and the people take them in good part.

With reckless hardihood, Murker had made his way behind the curtain that separated the dressing-room from the arena, and just at the proper moment for his designs, for the first person he met was Jessie herself.

As the young girl caught sight of the lowering countenance of the man she so

much dreaded, she started back, with a slight exclamation of alarm.

"So you seem to remember me," said Murker, sneeringly. "Well, it is a good thing that you do. I've come for you."

"You've come for me!" repeated Jessie, as though she had not heard aright.

"Yes, come for you. Ain't the words plain enough? Go an' get your traps and prepare to leave this place," said the ruffian, coarsely.

"Never!" replied the girl, with flashing eyes.

"Won't you? Well, we'll see about that!"

Several of the performers, attracted by the loud talking, now gathered round, and as more than one of them were with the circus when the accident to Henry had occurred, Murker found himself surrounded by lowering faces, and heard mutterings that boded no good to himself.

"What is this disturbance?" asked one of the men. "And you, sir, how dare you show your face inside the canvas, much less the dressing-room?"

Murker shrunk under the keen gaze and stern tones of the actor, but he braced himself and answered, boldly:

"I've come here to claim my daughter," and he pointed, with outstretched arm, to Jessie.

"Your daughter! Impossible!" were heard on ever side from the astounded crowd.

"It is false!" cried Jessie, drawing back with every appearance of disgust and dislike in her manner. "It is false! He once gave the old woman with whom I lived twenty dollars for her consent to take me away. That failing, he now comes with this infamous story," and the young girl turned away with a visible shudder.

"What have you to say to this, sir?" sternly asked the actor who had been spokesman. "She denies your claim, and we believe her, and the sooner you—"

"But I have the proofs! I have the proofs!" eagerly exclaimed Murker. "She is my child, and there is no power to prevent my taking her from this place."

"Then produce your proofs," said the actor, "and see that they *are* proofs, or it may fare the worse for you. We know you, and I think there is not one present but who would be glad of the chance to give you a sound drubbing."

"They shall be forthcoming at the proper moment." Then, turning to Jessie, Murker continued: "It is useless for you to resist. Your mother is dead, and you are left an heiress. Your property will be in my charge."

"The story bears falsehood on its face. But, if it *is* true, take the money—all of it—use it as you like; any thing so that you leave me in peace and take your hateful person from my sight."

"You go with me," replied Murker, stoutly. "You may as well give in." Then drawing nearer, so that his words might be heard only by the girl, he hissed in her ear: "You want to stay so that you can be near Henry."

"And if I do? He is my friend, which is far more than I can say for you, even

though you are *my father*," said Jessie, with infinite scorn.

"It is to sever you from this love-sick youth that I came. I hate him! Do you hear? I *hate* him."

"Have you not done him injury enough already?"

"It matters not. He has wronged me, and I never forget an injury. But, cease this trifling! I have proofs with me that you are my lawful daughter, and the law gives me control of your person. Will you go quietly, or must I use force? Speak quickly; I have no time to waste," and the brute glanced triumphantly around the group.

At this moment the curtain was drawn aside, and another person appeared upon the scene.

It was the Boy Clown. The assassin was again face to face with his intended victim.

CHAPTER V.

THE VILLAIN'S TRACKS.

BACK into the past we must now retrace our steps, to where, just one year ago, we left Murker lying, stunned by the unknown's blow, upon the floor of the old dame's cottage.

The stroke, dealt by a strong and willing arm, had fallen upon the villain's bare head with terrific force, and had hurled him, senseless to the earth.

"By me sowl, but I belave I've kilt the vill'in intirely!" were the words that fell upon the wounded man's ear as he came back to sense and feeling. "If ye are dead, why the divil don't ye say so, and not be throublin' folks to fetch ye round?" and, for the third or fourth time the speaker, a stout Irish lad, doused a tin dipper full of water upon the already saturated victim.

Struggling to his feet, Murker glared savagely around, and catching sight of the Irish boy, he made toward him in a hostile attitude.

"Oh, be the powers, ain't ye got enough of it? Well, thin, come on, an' by St. Pathrick, but I'll feed ye wid me buck-thorn till yer belly's full. Whoop, now! an' have at ye!"

But Murker *had* got enough, and when he saw the shillalah whirling about in the air he quickly retreated behind where the old crone sat, and put up both hands for quarter.

"Hold off, you young devil," he said. "I want no more thumps on the head. Why did you strike me at all?"

"An' it's why did I strike ye! Well, 'pon me sowl but ye're a cool one! Wasn't ye a-cavortin' around jist, and batterin' the ould woman's shanty all to smithereens, and warn't the poor crathur a-yowlin' bloody murder as hard as iver she could pelt? And warn't your ugly top-knot the first one I see?"

"And so you struck me simply because my head was the most convenient thing about?" asked Murker, in a rage.

"Jist listen till him! how he guesses. Ye've hit it, by Saint Pathrick! But ye'll betther be a-bathin' iv it an' stop waggin' your jaw while I give the ould dame the bit iv a letter I've fetched."

For several minutes the Irish lad fumbled in his various pockets and rents in his garments, and then suddenly bethinking himself of his hat he snatched it off, and, from the lining thereof, produced a letter.

"There, ye divil! I've found ye at last!" he exclaimed, holding the missive toward the old crone, who, seemingly not understanding it was for her, made no motion to take it.

"Here's a letther for ye, ould woman, and maybe there's a fortin' inside iv it for yees. Hould on, ye spalpeen!" he continued, turning fiercely upon Murker, who had reached out his hand to take the packet. "The letther's for the ould woman, an' not for the like iv ye."

With trembling, palsied hands the old dame opened the letter, and then letting it fall upon her lap, gazed helplessly upon it, as though waiting for it to speak.

"And ye can't rade, is that it? No more can I, bad luck to the schoolin' I niver got. Oh, murther! but it's beautiful to be able to rade writin' whiniver ye loiks, and the man tould me that the ould dame must have the letther right away. Maybe it's yerself that can rade, ye blackguard?" he said, turning abruptly to Murker.

The latter declared that he could, and the letter was handed to him.

At first the man read carelessly, evidently wishing to get through with the task as soon as possible; but presently he began to manifest more interest, and before the conclusion his whole manner became excited, his dull eyes kindled; astonishment, incredulity and triumph, each in turn, dwelt upon his countenance. By a strong effort, however, he managed to suppress his feelings, but not, however, sufficiently soon to escape the keen eye of the Irish lad, who exclaimed:

"Be the sowl iv me grandmother! but yees looks as if the letther was for yerself, and not the ould woman!"

With a hand trembling under the strange excitement caused by the letter, Murker handed the missive back to the crone.

"A lucky blow that will prove to me if I can only carry the plan out," he muttered to himself. "Strange chance, and to think that it should turn up here after all these years. Now, then, my fine fledgeling, it will go hard but I cage you, and once caught, then to strike for the greater prize. But I must get that letter; it may be needed."

A few minutes later the Irish lad departed, leaving Murker at the cabin.

With him out of the way it was an easy matter to purloin the letter, and this being done, he, likewise, left to immediately commence his search for Jessie, whom it was now all important he should possess, as on that possession depended the success of his newly-laid scheme.

The young girl in her flight had left no trace behind by which he might obtain a clew to her whereabouts.

It never once occurred to him to look amid the followers of a traveling circus for the girl he sought.

He knew her to be totally without friends, never once admitting the possibility of an overruling Providence raising them

up for her in the hour of need; and so, trusting to a first impulse, he sought out the large cities, and there began the search in earnest.

There must have been some very powerful reason actuating the man to such unusual labor and expense.

It was morally impossible that Murker had fallen in love with the mere child, and it was not at all likely that any feeling of revenge for what she had subjected him to, would furnish cause sufficient to impel this persistent pursuit.

For months Murker persevered in the seemingly hopeless task, never flagging or growing despondent, but always energetical, hopeful, as though he felt sure of ultimate success.

On several occasions he fancied the right clew had at last been found, and each time he scarcely slept or eat until he had exhausted the thread that he had been following only to find that it had led him wrong.

The man's tenacity of purpose was truly wonderful, and clearly showed how deeply important he considered the discovery of the young girl.

At last he chanced to stumble, by the merest accident, upon the right trail, and, like a well-trained hound, he took the scent and was off for the far-away place where she was said to have been seen.

One night, while sitting in a low groggery in one of the great eastern cities, a rough-looking man came in, and all other tables being occupied by parties engaged in drinking or card-playing, he took a chair on the opposite side of the one at which Murker was seated, and called loudly for his drink.

For some time the man drank silently, but Murker observed that every time he raised his glass to his lips he would glance furtively at him over the edge.

So often did this occur that Murker, who was irritable and cross, finally said, snappishly:

"I hope you'll know me the next time you see me. You ought, anyway."

"Beg yer parding, comrade!" said the man, good-naturedly, "but, yer see, as how I knows that mug o' yourn, though, cuss it all, I can't place yer."

"Well, sir, if you do know me, which I doubt, that is no reason you should stare a man out of countenance!" exclaimed Murker, while a dark scowl settled upon his face.

"Thar! I know yer now by that grum-my look onto yer han'some phizahogomy. Yer Murker," said the man, in high glee.

"Well, and if I am, what then?" inquired Murker, uneasily.

"Nothin' pertickeler, only it was funny that I should come ag'in' you here. Don't reckoleck me, eh? Well, I knows you. Mebby yer don't mind the night as little Henry was hurt by that rope a-breakin' on the trapeze."

"What have I to do with that?" said Murker, gloomily. "Who are you?"

"Dillson, canvas-man with the Copenhagen Circus. I left it 'way down South."

At first, Murker was reserved, not feeling sure of the man Dillson's true sentiments toward him; but, as glass after glass of li-

quor was drank they grew more and more intimate.

Dillson had been telling him of events that had transpired since he (Murker) left the company.

"We had rare good luck one night, by George! It was the werry night as you—as the boy hurt hisself. We was travelin' to next station, and a awful storm a-blowin', when, all at onc't, old Jake's leaders shied at somethin' on the roadside, which somethin' turned out to be as han'some a young gal as ever yer seen. Well, the manager jess took a likin' to her from the start, and 'twan't long before she was the favorite of everybody in the troupe. I never see a gal I'arn to ride like that 'un! She seemed like as if it was nateral for her to be a-settin' or standin' on the pad; and though she ain't been in the company quite a year yet, she can jump a banner, bu'st a balloon, or take the big hurdles 'long with the best of 'em."

At the first mention of the girl, Murker was wide awake, and full of eager curiosity to learn more.

"What is her name?" he asked, almost breathlessly.

"Why, man, what's the matter? Nothin', eh? Well, yer look like a good deal was the matter. What do yer want to know the gal's name for?" and the man looked keenly at his companion.

"Pshaw! Hang it, there's nothin' in it! Ain't it natural that an old member of the company should want to know all about what's going on, and who does it?"

"The gal's name is Jessie," growled the canvas-man. "She's a sweet critter, and the vill'in as would do her hurt had better keep clear of the company, that's all."

But Murker had heard all he wanted, and scarcely waiting to settle his score at the bar, he was away.

That night, he boarded a Southern-bound train, and in five days stood in the town where the circus had performed some weeks before.

Here he satisfied himself of the correctness of his surmises by obtaining a minute description of Jessie, and then pushing forward in the track of the caravan, he finally overtook it at the town where we left him, in the dressing-room of the circus, confronted by the youth he had so injured, and whom he was preparing to deal a yet more deadly blow.

CHAPTER VI.

PLANNING AN ESCAPE.

"WELL, Murker," exclaimed Henry, "what do you want here? Would you like to make another attempt on my life?"

"I don't know what you mean," answered Murker; "I have come to claim my daughter."

"Your daughter? Where is she, I would like to know?"

"Would you, indeed? Then your highness shall be gratified. She stands beside you."

"What! Jessie?"

"Yes, Jessie."

"I can not believe him, Henry," spoke

up Jessie; "and yet, he says he has proofs that I am his child."

"If he has proofs, which I am much inclined to doubt, let him produce them," answered Henry.

"You shall see whether I can not make my claim good. If you feel inclined to listen to my story, I will narrate it to you," replied Murker.

"Proceed."

"Fifteen years ago, I fell in love with a lady whose parents were wealthy, and, as I was poor, they looked upon my suit as an unfavorable one; but, the lady loved me, so that I cared little about gaining their consent. We met clandestinely for over a year, and our love for each other was honest, true and pure. I begged of her parents to bestow their child upon me, but they were deaf to all my entreaties. Finding that it was useless for us to sue further, we eloped and were married. We lived happily for a couple of years, and had a child born to us—Jessie here; but, I took to drink, and, though I am almost ashamed to say it, I treated my wife illy. One night, I came home to find my wife had fled from me, taking the child with her. From that day until last year, I lost all trace of them, but this letter comes from the parents of my late wife; I will read you a few lines of it."

He took from his pocket a large letter, and read a portion of it. It was addressed to the old woman in whose charge Jessie had been left, and told that the child's mother was dead; that before her death, her parents had repented of their harshness, and, wishing to atone for it as they best could, desired to make Jessie their heiress, and that if her father were living he would be received as their son.

It was all a mystery to Henry, and he regarded it with incredulity.

"This does not go to prove that Jessie is your child," Henry said.

"Just look at the letter, and see the husband's name written out—Archibald Murker—and I believe that is my name."

"It is, doubtless, all a forgery," replied Henry.

"Forgery or no forgery, I shall take Jessie away with me, and no one has a right to stay me from my purpose. To-morrow, I will bring legal measures, which cannot be resisted."

Jessie clung to Henry, in despair.

Murker left the tent, feeling elated with the misery he was causing two honest and hopeful hearts.

The exhibition over, Henry, as was his wont, accompanied Jessie to her hotel.

"Henry, do you believe this man's story?" asked Jessie of her companion.

"No, I do not. He has proved himself equal to committing a murder, and such a man would not hesitate to utter a lie, or forge a letter," answered Henry.

"And yet, I fear him, Henry. Oh! so much. He may be able to prove I am his daughter," sobbed the girl.

"Don't weep, Jessie. Suppose Murker's story is true, would you not be happier to live a life of ease rather than be one who is at the mercy and caprice of a changeable public?"

"No, Henry. I have something to tell you, but you must not breathe it to a single soul. I am going to run away."

"Run away?"

"Yes, to escape from this man. I am going to-night, when all is still and quiet. I never—never can live with him."

"Where would you go?"

"To the woods, the swamps. I have heard of hunted runaway slaves secreting themselves there, and why not I? Any fate is better than to be given into his keeping."

"You would perish in the swamps. You must give over this wild idea, and endeavor to cheer up. Affairs may not turn out so badly as you anticipate."

"I dare not wait, Henry. I have determined upon leaving this place, and to-night; for I feel that now is my only chance of escape. To-morrow I will be in his hands."

"Then I shall go with you."

"You will?"

"Yes, Jessie, I will. You will need a protector, and though I am young, yet I will try to be as good a friend as I can. Will you not let me?"

"Oh! so cheerfully. But, I can not take you away from a life that you are fond of. What claim have I upon you, that you should make this great sacrifice?"

"The very best of claims, namely, the duty one dear friend always owes to another. Do you think for a moment that I would quietly remain here and know that you were roaming the world without friend or protector?" replied Henry, his fine face all aglow.

And so they made their plans together. It was decided that the escape should be made at midnight. Every thing was got in readiness for the departure.

Murker was gloating over his success, and little thought that his bird would be flown ere he had a chance to catch it.

His dream was a strange one that night. He dreamed he was a man many years younger, and that he was passing through a lone and dismal forest. Whistling to keep his courage up, for it was a lonely path he was taking, suddenly he thought the air was filled with birds of a rapacious nature. He was astonished at the sight, yet he was still more so when he found, lying at his feet, the fast decaying body of a man. He stooped to look at it more closely, and found, in the pockets of the coat, letters, notes, and a small roll of bills. These he took possession of. He thought to turn them to account some day. It was a cruel deed to rob the dead as he was doing. When he emerged from that wood it seemed as though he was an entirely different man—as if he had left his former self in the dread past. He also secured a small pocket, in which were placed two miniatures; one was the counterpart of himself, while the other bore a resemblance to the girl, Jessie. Murker murmured in his sleep, "After long years of waiting, how amply am I repaid. It is worth all these years of wandering to be so rewarded in the end." Then there came before him a vision of a pale woman, with a pleading face and piteous voice, crying, "Wrong not the orphan."

The scene changed, and Murker was in

the woods again, fleeing for life, to escape the clutches of a grim skeleton, who was in pursuit of him. On and on they fled, the pursuer and pursued, and just as the skeleton was about to place its long hands upon Murker's neck, the latter awoke with a loud scream, and covered with a profuse perspiration.

"What a fool I was to be frightened by a dream," he exclaimed.

He did not dare to close his eyes again that night, but got up and lit a lamp, reading, writing, and plotting mischief against an innocent child. And for what? The idol, gold, for which many a human being has bartered his soul.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEPARTURE.

THE Boy Clown slept but little that night. He was too intent over his plans, which were not of a very definite nature. He thought Jessie extremely unwise in what she was intending; but he knew the nature of the girl, and felt assured that, as she had made up her mind to escape, it would take a great amount of arguing to turn her from her purpose.

"It is a great sacrifice I shall undergo," he said, "for I do love this wandering life; and the laughter and applause of the audience are to me very attractive. It is my duty to go with Jessie. I feel it to be a wrong step for both of us; yet I will not let her go alone. What good will come of it? likely we will starve in the woods. We may wander on until we come to some farm-house, where work can be obtained. Right or wrong, I feel that it is my duty to be a protector to Jessie. May God direct us aright, and may good in the end come from where bad is in the beginning."

The clock struck twelve, and, as the last stroke vibrated on the night, Henry heard a light tap on the door, and a gentle voice exclaim, "Henry, are you ready?"

The boy answered the summons, and after arranging the few things they deemed necessary for their flight they took their departure. It was a lovely night. Beauty was to be seen everywhere. The lofty trees, with their beautiful covering of green; the moon, shining in all its brilliancy, made the scene one of enchanting loveliness. Henry and Jessie forgot for a moment their troubles as they stopped to admire it. They were veritable babes in the woods. They seemed to imagine that their trials were almost at an end, when, indeed, they were only just beginning.

"Why are you so silent, Henry?" asked Jessie.

"I did not mean to be; but I do not consider the step we are taking to be the right one," answered her companion.

"I feel it to be right, Henry. But I can not bear to have you accompany me. That is the only thing which does not seem right."

"Are you afraid to trust yourself to my care?"

"No, Henry; I know you to be a good and faithful friend. You have no cause to fly, as I have. You are losing nearly every thing by thus espousing my cause."

"Jessie, I once heard a preacher read from the Bible these beautiful words: 'Whither thou goest, there will I go, and where thou dwellest there will I dwell; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.' It is thus I feel for you. I have given you my word, and I will not break it."

Strange words to come from a clown, were they not, and yet could they be nobler?

"Jessie, I have been thinking that after the search for us has been given over, we had better beg for work at some farm-house, and, in the quiet round of duties, forget all trials and troubles."

"Will not Murker find us out?"

"No, for we can change about, and rove from place to place."

The rumbling of wheels caused the run-aways to turn, and discover a team coming behind them. The driver, noticing Henry and Jessie, asked them to take a ride. He proved to be a peddler, and, though traveling in a Southern State, had all the peculiarities and inquisitiveness of a Yankee. They accepted the invitation, and a conversation at once commenced.

"Where might you be traveling at this time of night?" asked the wagoner.

"Not far," was the evasive answer.

"Was you to the circus to-night?"

"Of course."

"Wasn't it prime fun? The fellow that acted out the clown was a smart young 'un. He'll make his fortin' I'll be bound. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps," answered Henry. "How did you like the lady rider?"

"Oh, she was pretty enough to be the queen of England. If I wasn't a married man, with a couple of squalling youngsters in the cradle to home, I might take a notion to shine up to her myself. But, I guess that Boy Clown will be after her, one of these days. He kinder looked at her loving-like when he held the ropes for her to jump over. I seen it, plain as day."

Even under the paint of red and white, Henry's boy love for the charming Jessie could be read in his face. Ah! this love is a sad tell-tale.

"But," continued the peddler, "I allus like the clown part best. It's in my nature to laugh, and it makes me feel ten times better when I can have a hearty guffaw. My wife is one of the quiet kind, and calls my laughing, howling. By the way, youngster, don't you know of some song to cheer us on our way? It'll keep us awake, and I'm near asleep now."

"I'll try to," answered Henry; "but it will not be a very sensible one."

"Never mind that as long as it's funny."

So Henry rattled off the following jingle:

Swiggleton, Swaggleton,
Wiggling Jane;
Higgletton, Haggletton,
What's in a name?
Swiggerty, Swaggerty,
Mother and I,
Riggerty, Raggerty,
Eat a piece of Kiddiwink pie.
Lickerty, Lookerty,
Mother's old hen;
Kickerty, Kockerty,
Laid a gold pen,
Hickery, Hockery,
Sal's got a beau,
Mickery, Mockery,
And his name's Joe.

Turketum, Torketum,
He kissed her so nice;
Smurketum, Smorketum,
Once and twice, thrice,
Jingletum, Jangleton,
Look in the sky,
Kissingum, Kassington,
Nobody's by.

Fingletum, Fangleton,
Sal's an old maid;
Stringletum, Strangleton,
Well, who's afraid?
Sackleback, Sickleback,
She'd marry a Jew;
Hackleback, Hickleback,
There, I've got through.

This seemed to satisfy the peddler, for he stamped with a gusto that showed he was well pleased. It was now time to leave their new-found friend, and, as they saw a large piece of woods not far distant, Henry and Jessie stopped the driver, and, telling him that they had but a short walk before them, left him, bidding him good-night, and thanking him for the ride they had been treated to.

The peddler drove off one way, as Jessie and Henry took the path to the woods.

It was a warm night in the midst of summer, consequently our young hero and heroine did not feel those inconveniences, which they would have done, had it been winter. Jessie was tired, and after finding a soft place to sleep, threw herself upon the ground, and was soon lost to all consciousness. Henry was too much excited with the events of the evening to allow him to close his eyes, so that the girl had a watcher.

Jessie slept calmly on, and her regular breathing indicated that she was peaceful and calm in her dreams.

And so the night passed, and the gray of dawn was creeping up the eastern sky before the faithful sentinel thought of relinquishing his post for the purpose of catching an hour or so of sleep.

The spot selected for the night's rest was beneath the wide spreading branches of a huge oak tree, over which a large grape-vine had circled its many folds, thus making still more dense the leafy canopy that served to shelter them from the dew.

A short distance from where Jessie lay sleeping, the main, or largest stem of the vine had taken root, and, as Henry turned to take a glance at the sleeping girl, to make sure that his movements had not disturbed her, a slight, very slight motion, of what he at first thought was the hanging vine, attracted his attention.

It was but a hasty, careless glance, but it rested long enough for him to see that it was something else than the vine that had moved.

Another and longer look through the gloom that still pervaded beneath the heavy foliage, and instantly a low cry of terror burst from the parted lips of the almost paralyzed youth.

Around and around the brown stem he saw the folds of an enormous serpent twined, and heard, as if in answer to his cry, the sharp hiss that tells the reptile's anger has been aroused, while at the same instant, the broad, flat head shot forth, nearly reaching to where the unconscious girl lay, and began a slow, wavering motion from side to side.

The light grew stronger each moment, and little by little the true size of the rep-

tile, with its flashing tongue and glittering eyes, became revealed.

Henry had a brave, strong heart and cool head, but in the face of this approaching danger, not to himself, unfortunately, he thought, but to the helpless girl who slept on unconscious of peril, he stood completely unnerved. But he soon recovered, and instantly prepared to offer his life if necessary.

Without changing his attitude, he glanced around in hopes of seeing a stout stick that might be used as a weapon of attack, but unfortunately there was none at hand, and when he made a motion as though to go in search of one, he immediately saw that such a step would at once precipitate matters.

Even the almost imperceptible movement he had already made, aroused the serpent to the utmost fury, as if the creature was aware of his intentions, and hiss after hiss cut sharply on the silence.

What could he do? He could not hope that the attack would be much longer deferred, and there, in easy reach of the fell stroke, lay Jessie, with her fair white throat fully exposed.

Suddenly he remembered that his knife, a strong, serviceable weapon, with keen edge, was in his pocket. Slowly stealing his hand upward, he grasped the weapon, and cautiously drew it out.

The next moment the blade was open, and then, with a single bound over the sleeping form, he stood between it and danger.

He was not a second too soon, for even as he alighted, the reptile launched itself forward, striking him full on the breast with such force as to almost knock him from his feet.

But that blow was his salvation. Had he stood his ground an instant the coils would have been about him; but, in staggering back, he got beyond the reach of the tail that whizzed past his face, while at the same time he instinctively made a slashing sweep with his knife.

He felt the blade come in contact with a yielding substance, and knew that fortune had favored the stroke.

Such, indeed, was the case. The reptile, a moment before so formidable, now lay writhing and twisting with horrible contortions upon the ground at his very feet, the body nearly severed a short distance from the head.

With a joyful cry Henry quickly stooped, and, raising Jessie in his arms, bore her beyond reach of the terrible thrashings of the snake.

"Where am I? What is the matter, Henry?" exclaimed the young girl, wildly, and then catching sight of the wounded reptile, she uttered a piercing shriek of terror.

"It is powerless to do you harm now, Jessie," said Henry, striving to calm the frightened girl. "You have had a narrow escape, but, thank God, I was permitted to avert the danger."

"Oh! how fearful it looks!" exclaimed Jessie, drawing still further back. "If it had bitten me, I could have died a horrible death."

No, I think the bite of this species is not poisonous. It is one of the *constrictors*, and kills its prey or enemy by crushing it in the folds or coils of its body."

"Could any thing be more horrible than to have such a monster coiled around your throat, and slowly strangling you to death? Oh! Henry, what do I not owe you?" and Jessie placed both hands in those of her companion. The tears streamed from her eyes, but they were tears of gratitude, and, lover-like, Henry strove to kiss the pearly drops away.

Love in these two young hearts was developing early.

"I have often thought I have had warnings, Henry," said Jessie, speaking as if just coming out of a long reverie.

"How, Jessie?"

"It all seems very indistinct to me, but you and Murker are always mixed with them."

"That is not so very singular, considering that we have been so much associated with you."

"I know that, Henry, and yet there is a sort of skeleton ever separating Murker from me, and cautioning me to beware of him."

"You are nervous, Jessie. I think we ought to banish these superstitious feelings from us, and have a more firm reliance in the good Providence that guards the pure in heart."

The clown was preaching like a minister.

"I do believe in a Divine oversight, Henry."

While they were speaking, birds in large multitudes were flying in their direction, uttering shrill notes of terror. Rabbits rushed along, squirrels scampered past them, all as though they had been frightened from their burrows and nests. At first, the fugitives were inclined to think pursuers were after them.

Henry and Jessie looked about them, and saw, far above the tops of the tall trees, thick volumes of smoke making their way up to the heavens, and soon the heat became oppressive; the very air was hot, and they gazed at each other in amazement.

The smoke grew denser and the heat more intense.

At last, the horrible truth flashed through the brain of the Boy Clown, and he exclaimed:

"Merciful Heaven, the woods are on fire!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A FIERY FURNACE.

THE fierce and rapacious element of fire was on its devastating march, and, like its many former raids, seemed as though he would not leave, until he was a conqueror. The situation to Henry was a most trying one. With the frightened and fainting girl in his arms, his chances for escape did not look of a very promising nature.

Were they to end their lives in the deep woods, and was the skeleton seen in Jessie's dream to be theirs?

The situation was truly appalling, and

well calculated to shake the nerves of even the strongest and bravest.

Upon every side, look where he might, he could see the fire climbing the huge trunks or leaping from limb to limb, while over all great masses of black smoke were whirling, almost entirely obscuring the rays of the morning sun.

The air was filled with flying brands and cinders, while ever and anon a deafening roar was heard, marking where some mighty tree, sapped of its strength, had fallen to the earth.

There seemed no mode of escape, for the fiery wall encircled the spot where the two wanderers stood, while each moment the circle grew smaller, and the atmosphere more difficult and painful to breathe.

Henry saw that something must be done, some effort made, and although it seemed almost hopeless, yet the brave boy did not altogether despair.

Not far off he discovered a small brook that ran through the wood, and thither he bore the now unconscious girl, and placing her upon a grassy mound close to the edge, he dipped his cap full of the cooling liquid, and with it bathed Jessie's brow and temples.

Leaving his charge here, he ran rapidly down the course of the stream, it having suddenly occurred to him that by following it he might perchance find an opening for escape from the fiery furnace.

He dared not remain absent long, and after proceeding some little distance he determined to return to Jessie, and taking her in his arms, should she still be insensible, make the attempt to reach open ground. He quickly retraced his steps to where he had left his charge, but, what was his surprise and alarm to find that Jessie had disappeared!

At first he supposed that she had recovered, and missing him, had wandered off a little way; but, after calling her name repeatedly and receiving no reply, he became very much alarmed, and ran hither and thither, wildly calling upon her to answer.

Only the echo of his own voice, mingled with the roar of the flames, and the deafening crash of falling trees, came back to him.

There was now but a scanty time left for him to think and act; with terrible strides the fire was closing in upon him, and although nearly wild with anxiety on Jessie's account, yet the instinct of self-preservation asserted itself, and after one more look around with the faint hope that she might yet be seen, he dashed off down the rivulet at the top of his speed. He knew that his remaining in the place he had just left could not possibly afford the lost girl any aid, and there was a shadow of hope in his heart that she might have escaped.

As he was running swiftly along the bank of the stream his eye chanced to fall upon a cave in a rocky ledge upon the further side, and quick as thought he determined to seek shelter here, trusting to that kind Providence, which had hitherto saved him from death, to bring him safely through the present impending danger.

In a moment he crossed the creek, and pushing aside some bushes that grew about

the entrance, entered the cavern and made his way back into its gloomy depths.

The place was much larger than Henry had thought, judging by the narrow mouth through which he had been compelled to crawl on hands and knees, and without difficulty, other than the profound darkness, he crept still further back as the smoke from without began to pour in.

Soon the air of the cave grew to be stifling, and it became necessary that he should retreat yet more, and this he did, feeling his way along the rugged walls step by step.

In this manner he proceeded some half a hundred yards, when, on suddenly turning a corner caused by the cave's making an abrupt bend he felt a breath of pure, sweet air, coming from the depths beyond, fan his cheek.

How very grateful this was to the oppressed lungs of the young man can be imagined, and it brought with it not only relief, but renewed hope as well, for Henry knew that there must be another opening or outlet to the cave, else whence came this now strong current of air.

Strengthened by the thought, Henry continued to feel his way, and was presently rewarded by seeing, apparently a great way off, a gleam of light that looked like a star shining in the midst of surrounding darkness.

Henry had left Jessie's side but a few moments, when she recovered from her faint attack, to find herself lying on the margin of the brook. Looking up to see where her companion was, she saw her peril at once. She tried to scream, but her power of utterance seemed gone. Nature was too much overtasked, and she fainted again.

There was another personage in these woods, unknown to our hero and heroine, a brawny-armed, but good-natured and honest negro, named Pete Morgan. He had the reputation of being afraid of naught. He had been away on a visit, and was returning, when he encountered Jessie.

As the girl was in no condition to give an account of herself, the negro took her up in his arms, and stepping into the brook, he waded along up the stream. He was a muscular fellow, and as his burden was light, he made rapid progress, stopping only to wipe the drops of perspiration from his forehead.

It was at a most palatial residence he stopped, at one of the many so famous at the South. Elegance was its great characteristic. Luxury was seen at every portion of the mansion. The negro carried his charge into the kitchen, and, much to the consternation and astonishment of the cook, Dinah, placed her in a chair.

"Lor's Pete," exclaimed Dinah, "what has you got dar?"

"Spec' it's a fainted gal. Dinah, de worl's all a-fire. It's a-roarin' an' a-ravin'; we's all a-goin' to be burned up."

Dinah said nothing, but put aside the dough she was kneading, fell on her knees, and commenced to croon some old-fashioned hymn.

"Get up, Dinah! It won't burn up until you gets troo makin' your bread. The woods is on fire. Didn't you smell no smoke?" said Pete.

"Lor's, yes," replied Dinah, rising, "but I didn't pay no heed to it. But whar did you come across de gal?"

"She was a-lyin', sweet and pretty, alongside of the brook, and she looked so helpless that I was boun' to save her, even if I got sizzled myself."

"You's a Christian, Pete; bress your brack skin. You did what de good Lor' tole us to do. He said, when we did good to one on his children, we was doin' it to him. Scriptur' says it better, but you know what it means."

"Yes, Dinah, and don't Scriptur' tole us to love one another?"

"Well, I'm sure I allus tried to; don't I Pete?"

"You may try to, but you don't allus do it. Don't you 'member how I wanted to make you my wife, and you said you couldn't love me well enough for dat?"

"I didn't know you was a Christian, den, coz you didn't exhort at the camp-meetin'; but I wouldn't refuse you now."

So Pete was an accepted lover of the dark Dinah, and they both did all that lay in their power to restore the young sufferer to consciousness.

At last Jessie rewarded their endeavors by opening her eyes and looking around.

"Don't you be afeard, miss; you's in good hands," said the thoughtful Dinah. "Pete, here, found you on de brookside, and toted you home."

"Is Henry here?" exclaimed Jessie.

"Who does you mean, miss?"

"A young boy who was with me in the woods. I fainted away, and when I came to myself he was gone."

"Then, he mus' be cl'ar burned up, for de woods blazes as though de drefful day ob judgment was come," said Pete.

"Oh! cannot some one go and save him?" pleaded Jessie.

"It would be a temptin' o' Providence to rush into dat fiery furnace," answered Pete.

"Then you ought to have left me there, too," said Jessie.

"It's cl'ar wickedness to talk so, honey. Remember, dar's one who holds us in de holler ob his hand," said the pious Dinah.

"Was de young man your brudder?" asked Pete.

"No; he was only a friend, but he was a sincere friend. We both belonged to a circus; but there was a bad man said *he* was my father, and was going to carry me off, so we ran away together to escape from him."

"You was naughty children to b'long to a circus; you was naughtier still to run away wid a boy, and it'd sarve him right to be suffumated," burst forth from the excited Dinah.

"Dar, now, Dinah, dat isn't Christian feelin'," broke in Pete.

"Wal, Lor' forgive me; I's sorry," and Dinah threw her colored apron over her head.

At this moment, the kitchen door opened, and a handsome, middle-aged lady, dressed in deep mourning, entered. The sable servants made their "respects" to her, and repeated Jessie's story.

The lady listened, with astonishment.

"My poor child," she said, taking Jessie's hand and drawing her to her side, "yours has, indeed, been a rough path for one so young; but, here you may rest, safe, I think, from pursuit, while we see what can be done toward finding your young companion."

"Oh! dear lady, you are indeed kind; but, alas! I fear that harm has befallen Henry, and he was so good, so kind and brave!" and Jessie covered her face and wept bitterly.

Under the soothing words and kindly caresses of the good lady of the mansion, who persisted in asserting that a young and active man had no need to perish in the forest, and, therefore, that Henry must still be alive and safe, Jessie gradually recovered, and was soon able to give Mrs. Atkins, for such was the lady's name, a more detailed account of all that had happened, than the simple-minded negroes had done.

"A strange story, my child," said Mrs. Atkins, aloud; and then turning slightly away, while a look of deep sadness stole over her face, she murmured:

"How like is her sweet face to that dear one we have lost."

The more Mrs. Atkins regarded Jessie, and it seemed that it was impossible that she could refrain from doing so, the stronger some impression, or belief, seemed to fasten itself upon her mind.

She made the young girl repeat the story of her early life more than once again, and plied her with questions as to her earliest memories.

These were few and faint and seemed to afford the lady no light upon a subject that she was evidently much interested in.

While this was going on in Mrs. Atkins's own room, for thither they had gone, Pete and Dinah were engaged, in the kitchen, in spirited debate, Dinah, as usual, doing most of the talking.

"Fore de goodness grashious, Pete, I 'clar' it most took my bref when I fust see dat chile. She so much favor our Miss Lizzie what's dead and gone," said Dinah, who was busy at the dough-trough.

"Dar! I done know'd I hab see somebody dat gal look like. You's tole de trufe dis time, shua. Golly! she like 'nough to be our young misses' own darter, and, Dinah,"—here Pete's voice sunk to a low, mysterious tone, and he leaned over toward his sable sweetheart—"you knows Miss Lizzie had a little pickaninny what got losted."

"Lor', Pete! s'posen' dis gal was—"

"Hush, Dinah; missus heah you, and den de debble of a bobbery be raised," said the cautious Pete.

"My child," said Mrs. Atkins, after she had exhausted all questions, "you are strangely like one who was very dear to me, and who now sleeps peacefully beneath the sod! My only child, who went away and died among strangers. She left a child, a daughter, as we ascertained, who, if she be alive, would be of your age. My heart goes out to you as it has never done to another since *she* left us, and the dead seems to speak to me through your voice. Stay with me here. Your home shall be a happy one after the trials and hardships of

your life, and, should it prove that the secret promptings of my heart are false, you shall still always find in me a true friend."

These words, while they astonished Jessie no little, were, nevertheless, very sweet to her, and she might have been completely happy, but for the terrible suspense that hung around the fate of her young friend, Henry.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PLANTER'S HOME.

THAT little gleam of light was to Henry as a guiding star, and with his eyes fixed hopefully upon it, he pushed forward, now and then stumbling, it is true, and sometimes bumping his head severely against pendent stalactites or projecting corners, but, all the time nearing the end of his wearisome journey.

The outlet, for such it proved to be, was at last reached, and, climbing over the great rock that lay just within, he emerged to find himself upon the very brink of a wide and swiftly-flowing river.

Above his head, and upon either hand, the fire raged, and even where he stood the air occasionally felt hot and stifling.

The boy's ready wit at once showed him the only mode of escape. He must go thence by water, and as he was a good swimmer, he at once prepared for the venture. Removing his shoes and jacket, he made them into a compact bundle, which he fastened securely upon his shoulders, or, rather, back, and thus watching until a log, of which there were many afloat, should pass near enough in, he finally fixed upon one, and, entering the water, struck boldly out from shore.

He soon reached the drift, and after several attempts, succeeded in getting astride of it, and in this manner he floated down the stream, safe at least from all danger of perishing by fire from the burning forest.

The log floated steadily—that is, without rolling—and, presently, after rounding a curve in the stream, he saw with delight that he was nearing the outer limits of the conflagration.

Below the bend, the wood became less dense, gradually growing more and more sparsely, and, after a little while, ceased altogether, and the broad, open cotton-fields lay upon either side.

The young voyager now began to think of landing; and, casting his eye about on the surface of the water, he was fortunate enough to discover a short stick floating within reach of his hand.

This he secured, and using it as a paddle, he slowly turned the head of his raft shoreward, and gradually worked himself in.

When within a rod or so of the bank, a clear, strong voice hailed, and, glancing up, Henry saw a young man, probably about his own age, standing near the edge of the water intently regarding his movements.

"Boat ahoy!" shouted the stranger. "Be the powers! but will yees be afther tellin' a feller the name iv that craft, an' where the devil ye are bound to?"

"I'm bound for that bank there," called Henry, laughing; "but my propelling pow-

er is deficient, and I'm afraid I'll have to land further down."

"Not a bit iv it!" shouted the Irish lad, for such his brogue pronounced him to be. "Not a bit iv it. Put in yer strokes foinsly an' sthrongly on the aff side 'iv the crathur, an' I'll jist help ye a bit with her head!" and before Henry knew the other's intent, he had his coat off and was in the water swimming with quick, strong strokes out to where he was.

In five minutes, the log grounded in shoal water near the bank, and Henry, getting off, stepped ashore.

"An' now that ye are safe an' sound on terry-firmy, would yeez be tellin' a chap where the blazes ye've been floated from on that ould log?" asked the Irish lad, whose curiosity was strongly excited.

"From above the bend yonder. I was caught in the woods by the fire, and this was my only way out," replied Henry.

"An' a foin way it wur, be the sowl av me! Ye was in them burnin' woods! Sure ye must 'a' been born to be hung, meanin' no offence."

"Why should I be hanged?" inquired our hero, with a smile.

"Why? Why, shure, nather wather nor fire could finish ye, an' they says that whin that's the case the man's bound to be hung, jist," replied Pat. "But, come 'wid me," he continued. "I'm on me way down to the big house beyant, an' there's where ye can dhry yer garments, an' maybe the grand folk 'll give ye a drop iv the crathur, that'll put life into your bones an' body."

"Where do you mean, my friend?" asked Henry.

"To the big house, beyant the clump iv trees ye see acress the field. Och! but it's a foin place, an' the lady is a lady, iv'ry inch iv her, from the sowl iv her purty foot till the top iv her head, God bless her!"

It was to the mansion of Mrs. Atkins that Pat alluded, and thither the two lads took their way across the field.

Dinah opened the door in answer to the somewhat formidable rattle made upon it by the Irish boy's shillalah, but, no sooner had she done so than she uttered a loud cry, and, throwing her apron over her head, fled in dismay to the kitchen, where she informed Pete, "Dat de debble hisself was out dar at de doo'."

Indeed, Henry, with his blackened face, and singed hair and garments, did not present a bad picture of "de debble"—that is, to Dinah's distorted vision; but there was one within the house who saw and recognized him through all the disguise.

Jessie had caught sight of our hero through an open window, as he came up the gravel walk, and, in her impulsive way, rushed to him, and embraced him.

"Well, if he ~~is~~ the divil, there's the swatest, purtiest angel out of heaven a-hugging of him to death. Faith! I'd like to be a divil myself to be hugged in that way."

The meeting of Jessie and Henry was a mutual surprise, for each had looked upon the other as dead. The love and sympathy which had for so long a time lain dormant in the heart of Mrs. Atkins was rekindled, and she looked after the welfare of her

young visitors with all the care and tender solicitude of a mother. Mr. Atkins agreed, with his wife, that the wanderers should be lodged at his house, and they, accordingly, had beds provided for them.

When Murker arose next morning, and found that Jessie had gone, his rage knew no bounds. He cursed his own stupidity, and at first resolved to send out scouts in all directions in pursuit of the fugitive. But, wiser second thought suggested to him a far better course.

Having in his possession certain proofs that would, he fancied, make good his claims as the father of Jessie, and also the letter written by the Atkinses to the old woman who had reared the young girl, he determined to at once go down to them at their plantation, never dreaming that he would find Jessie there, and at once boldly declare himself their son-in-law.

Having done this, he would induce them to participate in the search for the missing girl, and thus, if possible, throw the burden of any expense that might be incurred upon their hands.

Murker carried his resolve into execution, and, late in the evening, presented himself at the Atkins mansion. Here he had a long interview with the family, and so conclusive did his proofs seem, that, unwilling as they were to acknowledge it, they were forced to believe that Murker was the missing husband of their dead Lizzie. It seemed strange to them that he had so altered since the time when they first knew him, but, he had the same looks, and as he had all the documents necessary to establish his claim, the memory of the dead Lizzie caused them to overlook his brusque and rough manners.

The man promised to lead a better life in the future, and made a thousand protestations of penitence for the past.

It was a bitter task for Jessie to acknowledge the man as her father.

Pat Doley, the Irish lad, might have handed in his evidence, in regard to Murker's reading the letter in the old woman's hut, for it was he; but the lad arose and left so early, that he did not know of his presence. Thus it is through life; often a deed of wrong might be prevented by a single word, and yet, fate decrees that word should remain unspoken.

A week later, Henry announced his intention of leaving. Mr. and Mrs. Atkins desired that he should make a home with them, but his heart craved for the excitement and busy life of the circus-performer, now that Jessie was gone. He started forth to rejoin his former companions, who were not distant many miles. Here he was welcomed by one and all.

Again he was in the circus-ring, chattering away like a young Yorick, while the ring-master was obliged to make many a crack with his whip to keep him in order. He made sport of his adventure, telling his audience that the cave in which he had concealed himself was loaded with gunpowder, which, taking fire, caused him to be sent up into the air, his head and body going one way, and his legs and feet the other. A balloon sailing through the air caught the

former, while an eagle, clutched the other. He offered the eagle five dollars for the remainder of his furniture, which the eagle accepted and carried to the balloon. Here a lightning bolt shivered his floating vessel, and threw him into the sea; an alligator was close at hand, and on this he landed. A ride of a few miles brought him to the camp of a warlike tribe of Indians; they cast lots as to whether he should live or die, and it was decided that it would be a saving of provisions to have him depart to the happy hunting-grounds of the Kickapoos. He was, accordingly, tied by a cord—which universally accorded with the interests of the noble red-men—to a stake. The fagots were heaped around him, when a voice from the crowd threw a hatchet at his head, and—

"And what?" demanded the ring-master.

"To be continued in our next," was the Boy Clown's reply.

Laughter filled the tent, and Henry was acknowledged to be "a smart young 'un."

His dissertation on love was regarded as especially unique. Love, he said, was a blessing to tailors, dressmakers, perfume-dealers, and to those who ornamented the outer man and woman. It was a geat wear and tear on vests—for, the palpitation of the heart against them woré them out. As for himself, he thought people never did *fall* in love; they sunk gradually into it. What good was it for men to run after other men's sisters, when they had sisters of their own? He had heard of broken hearts—broken for love—but, it was *his* opinion, there were more cracks in their brains than breaks in their hearts.

The return of Henry to the circus made its manager's fortune. His extreme peril and marvelous escapes gained the sympathy of all, and thousands of people rushed to the tent when the Boy Clown appeared. It was gratifying to Henry, but, amid all his triumphs, he missed the fair form of Jessie, and often and often did he wish she could be with him.

The summer season came to an end, and, as the cold nights came on, the manager located his circus in one of the theaters in New York city. Henry was to make new triumphs here, but he bore them in a modest and becoming manner. Emulation pleased him, but did not make him vain.

The theater presented a gay appearance, with its finely dressed audience, who were never tired of laughing at Henry's jokes. It was on Christmas eve, and Henry having got through his night's work, muffled himself up in his winter clothing, and took his way homeward.

It was a bleak night, and the snow was falling fast. Persons were busy in the streets, buying presents, while others were decorating the churches, so that the morrow would find them ready to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace.

Sweet voices were caroling Christmas hymns, and the poor beggar was imploring "charity" from the passer-by, so that she could "live to see the blessed Christmas moon."

Henry was obliged to pass through a dark street, ere he could reach his home, and, as

he entered it, he saw it was quite deserted, save from the presence of a man who seemed to be struggling with a girlish figure.

"You've got to come along with me, my pretty little dear, so don't play shy. You'd better not make a noise, or I'll choke you on the spot," said the man.

"We'll see about that," said Henry. "It takes two to make a bargain of that kind," and he planted his fist straight between the eyes of the ruffian.

The blow told with terrible effect, for the man reeled and fell headlong on the pavement.

Released from the ruffian, the girl rushed into Henry's arms. The lad drew her to one of the gas lamps and looked into her face.

He started with amazement! It was Jessie, but, oh! so pale and careworn!

"Jessie!" he said, "what does this mean? Why are you here? Oh! answer me!"

"Oh! Henry, I wish I was dead," was her only answer.

CHAPTER X.

FOUND AND LOST.

"You must not talk of dying, Jessie," said Henry. "But, tell me why you are not with your grandparents? why have you left your father?"

"Oh! Henry, I can never believe him to be my father. I am wretched with him," answered Jessie.

"Take my arm and walk along with me, and tell me all about your troubles," replied Henry.

Jessie did so, and as they threaded the streets that Christmas eve, the poor child poured such a tale of sorrow into the boy's ears, that he could not refrain from weeping.

"For some time after you left us, Murker pretended to be a perfect saint, and did so much for Mr. and Mrs. Atkins that they were well pleased with him. But, oh! he talked so cruelly against you, and accused you of being vicious and bad. I used to go up in my chamber and hide, to escape hearing him talk so. One day, he told Mr. and Mrs. Atkins that you doubtless left me in the woods to burn alive. I burst into tears, and told him he was telling a wicked and sinful lie. This seemed to madden him, for he arose from his seat, and came to where I was sitting, and struck me with his hard hand."

"Shame on him!" uttered Henry, with his teeth clenched.

"If that had been the worst, I would not have cared so much, but, one night he came home in a drunken fit, and, because I would not do just as he wished, he threw a wine glass at me, and it cut my neck. I did not dare to tell of him, for he said if I did he would kill me. I knew of no other way to do than to run off. I heard that you were here, and I knew that you would aid me."

"Will not Mr. and Mrs. Atkins protect you from Murker?"

"They might. But, I have kept my troubles to myself. Dinah and Pete loaned me some of their savings to get here."

"Do you believe the Atkinses to be kin of yours?"

"Yes; I firmly believe them to be my grandparents, but Murker I will never believe to be my father."

"But, the proofs he had?"

"He probably came to them by fraud."

"It is a strange affair, look at it in all its lights. But, what do you intend doing, Jessie?"

"Going back to my old life—become a circus-rider again."

"Are you not afraid Murker will suspect your design, and find you out?"

"But I must do something."

"The landlady with whom I board is also a dressmaker, and she was saying at dinner to-day that she would like to take a young girl as an apprentice. Here you would be secluded, and it is ten to one if Murker ever thinks of looking for you here. What say you?"

"Oh! that would be far better than the other plan, for then he could not find me."

"Then I will speak to her this very night. She will find you a room, I am sure."

They had arrived at Henry's boarding-house, and Mrs. Smart was made acquainted with Jessie, as well as given a brief account of her trials and her desires. Mrs. Smart, like a good motherly being, agreed to all, and for a time, at least, Jessie was safe.

Christmas day dawned clear but cold. The snow, which fell on the night preceding, afforded fine sleighing. Holiday time circus people have to work, for it is then that they are patronized the most; consequently Henry was obliged to be away from Jessie all day. Yet, all of that time there was a feeling that the girl was unsafe where she was. He wished he had time to run home between the performances, but he had none. To others this was, indeed, a merry Christmas, but to the Boy Clown the hours passed heavily.

He gladly hailed the time when he had finished his duties and started for home. He was the last performer to leave the theater, and, as he did so, he encountered a woman crouching on the pavement, who cried, "For the love of the Blessed Savior, who was born this day, and by the honor you have for His Blessed Mother, spare me a few cents."

Henry, always having pity for the suffering, thrust a crisp one dollar greenback into the woman's hand.

"Heaven's blessing on you," exclaimed the woman. "Tell me your name, that I may remember it in my prayers."

"I am called Henry De La Forest."

"Then, thank God! I can be of help to you; I can save your life!"

"Save my life. What do you mean?"

"A short time since, as I was sitting here, I saw two men drawing near. I did not like their looks, and shrunk further into the shade, to avoid them. They did not see me, but commenced a conversation, in a low and guarded voice. They made a plan to meet a person to-night and waylay him."

"Who was this person?"

"They called him Henry De La Forest."

"Did you learn what object they had for committing the deed?"

"One of them said you knocked him down last night. Thank Heaven! I have been spared to warn you."

Henry thrust another bill of a larger denomination into the woman's hand, and pursued his homeward way. He was careful to avoid the shady side of the street, and felt partially secure, when, suddenly, he was seized from behind, tied and gagged. He was about giving himself up as lost. His assailers were so occupied with him that they did not notice a person who was on their track. While gloating over their good success, and thinking how easily they had secured Henry, a heavy whack from a thick club on each of their heads, felled them to the pavement.

Henry's gag was removed from his mouth and his hands untied.

"I'll bet the rogues know that an Irishman's muscle was made to be used. Faith, as Barney Williams says in 'Shandy Maguire,'" cried a well-known voice:

"We may be duped, we won't be dared. More fit to practice than to plan, But if the field of fame be lost, It shan't be by an Irishman."

"Why, Pat, how came you here?"

"I came to look for work."

"What, in this street?"

"No; I mane in York city."

"Have you been lucky?"

"Not enough to brag about. I tried to get a situation as a play-actor, for my clothes were as ragged as Billy Florence's, and my brogue as fine as Dan Bryant's, but the managers failed to see my wonderful talents. Then I went into the newspaper line, but I couldn't make money at that, for I tried to sell yesterday's news for to-morrow's."

"You have been unlucky, surely. But, do you remember the girl we met at the South?"

"As an Irishman never forgets a purty face, when he sees one, it's not for the likes of Pat Daley to be an exception to his countrymen."

"Well, she is here."

"What do you mane?"

Then, as they walked along together, Henry told his friend the whole story, and Pat let a little light in upon the dark subject, and told about Murker's reading the letter at the old hut.

They were met at the door of the boarding-house by Mrs. Smart. She drew back in astonishment and exclaimed:

"Good gracious! You! In the land of the living!"

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Henry, in surprise.

"A man came here this evening and said you had met with an accident at the circus. Jessie was so frightened that she put on her things to seek you."

"Jessie gone?"

"Yes. Didn't she find you at the circus?"

"No. There has been more treachery practiced here. Is that poor girl never to have rest? Where in this mighty city can I search for her?"

Ay! Where could he look? Have not

people been missing in the great metropolis for years, and yet never discovered? May not their bones be bleaching not far from where you now stand? The streets and alleys of New York could tell many a tale of wrong and suffering, misery and crime.

Henry was uneasy. He wanted to be doing something to trace out the lost girl, but it seemed so hopeless a task, that he was almost persuaded to abandon it.

It is not to be supposed that a man of Murker's disposition would allow himself to be baffled by a girl. He rightly conjectured that, as she had run away, she would immediately seek Henry. Of course he was well aware where Henry was, and thither he bent his footsteps.

He soon found out all he desired, and he knew that nothing short of danger to Henry would draw her from the house. His ruse succeeded, and the girl fell too readily into the trap laid for her. The carriage, into which she was pushed, proceeded on its way at a rapid pace, and it was not until it had stopped at a low and miserable dwelling, that she was aware of her danger.

"You may scream and kick to your heart's content. This house is a long way from any other, and you'll waste your breath in trying to make others hear you."

Jessie drew away from her persecutor. She could see no way of escape.

"Well, and what have you to say for yourself?" asked the man.

"Only this," answered Jessie; "I am a weak girl, thrown in your power. What I have done that you can treat me so, I can not tell. Who are you?"

The man lit a match, and by its light revealed his features. It was no one she had ever seen. He lit a lamp, and, after placing some provisions before her, left her presence. When he was gone she tried doors and windows, but all were heavily bolted and barred. She threw herself on the outside of the bed, and wept herself to sleep.

When Henry had once fully determined to pursue the search for Jessie, despite the seeming hopelessness thereof, he threw himself into the work with all the ardor of his generous and impulsive nature.

Every hour, when not engaged in the ring, was devoted to the search, and the great city was ransacked from one end to the other by the persevering lover.

In many of these wearisome jaunts Henry was accompanied by Pat Daley, whose ready tongue and keen wit not only opened the way many times, but saved them both, on more than one occasion, from assault, and perhaps murder.

When Henry was engaged at the circus, Pat would frequently pursue the search alone, or rather he would, while traversing the city in the capacity of rag and bottle gatherer, his only employment, keep constantly on the watch for some indication of the poor girl's whereabouts.

One day, while slowly traversing a lonely street in a distant part of the city, sounding his monotonous cry of "Any old rags for to sell?" he chanced to stop in front of an old, dingy-looking house, and, without

knowing why, began inspecting its front, examining each closely-shuttered window in turn.

"Whist! What the blazes was that?"

A slight noise from above attracted the Irish lad's attention, and running his eyes quickly over the several windows, he fancied he saw the outlines of a figure behind one.

"Is that you, Pat?" asked a voice from behind the shutter.

"Yes, it's me, Pat! But who the— Oh! murder! but I do believe it's the girl herself. Miss Jessie!" he called, raising himself on tip-toe and gazing eagerly upward. "If it's yerself, plase spake, an' be Saint Patrick but I'll have the ould shanty down!"

"Yes, Pat, it is I. I am a prisoner here. Convey the intelligence to Henry, that he may come and—" But the voice suddenly ceased, and the figure disappeared from the window.

"And it's there ye are, bless yer purty face! Be the powers but it's Pat Daley that'll take ye out iv that, and be hanged to the murderin' blackguard, ould Murker." And Pat forthwith began casting about for means of access to the house.

CHAPTER XI.

AVENGED!

MASTER PAT's daring deed was easier contemplated than carried out. The odds were greatly against him. The house was there, and so was the girl, but he wasn't so sure of there not being others who were guarding Jessie. If he endeavored to make an entrance—though by what means he could scarcely say—he might, himself, be taken a prisoner, and that would be like getting out of the frying-pan into the fire.

"Let's rayson the matter over a bit, and see what decision Pat and me is likely to come at. Pat's courage says, 'Take the gal away, by all manes, and be a hero of immortal fame.' Pat's prudence tells him, 'It would be better to inform Mr. Henry of his gal's whereabouts.' Courage says, 'Act like a fool,' and Prudence says, 'Behave like a true son of ould Ireland's sod.' So I'll foller Mr. Prudence's advice, and save the gal's bacon as well as my own, while my legs remark that it's best for me to let them trot with their full force to the theater, and see Mr. Clown."

And away he went, much to the grief and disappointment of poor Jessie, who imagined her deliverance was close at hand.

Henry had just come from the ring when Pat met him and informed him of his news. At first our young hero was overpowered with delight at the glad tidings; but, looking at the case in a serious light, he could see but little he could do. He had no right to release Jessie; for, if Murker was her father, the man had certainly the law on his side.

Speaking of the law put it into his mind that, maybe, there was a way Murker could be intimidated. Yet how? The memory of that awful night, when he came near losing his life, came vividly before him, and he felt that the time had arrived for action.

To the courts of law he would carry the case. Henry finally decided to place these matters before his own enemy and that of Jessie, and give his promise not to prosecute, if the assumed father would resign all claim to the girl, and allow her to remain with the Atkinses, in peace and quiet. If Murker proved himself unwilling to accede to Henry's plan, then the boy resolved to have him arrested. He felt assured he would be proven guilty, and might be sentenced to a term of imprisonment until Jessie became of age and was her own mistress.

"And what do you think of that plan, Pat?" asked Henry.

"Faith, the ould haythen might dare yez to do your worst, and be axin' after yer proofs," was Pat's reply.

"I should think the evidence of his ruffianism and his bad character were enough to convict him."

While these two lads were conversing together, poor Jessie watched the gathering clouds, wondering all the while why the Irish boy did not make an effort to save her. And where was Henry? Had all her friends deserted her?

Had she argued the dangers as well as had the Irish philosopher, she would not have blamed them so much as she did; but we are very apt to censure our best friends while they are doing all that lies in their power to aid us. Jessie was restless. She would walk up and down the little room in which she was imprisoned, and then lie down, only arising to have another walk. Many times a day did she try the fastenings of her door and windows, but she always found them secure. Yet in her trial she did not forget to ask the aid of the Omnipotent One, and, while she knelt in prayer, forgot her deep griefs and troubles.

In the lower portion of the building, Murker and his tool, Gregson Shorebird, the man who had abducted Jessie, were in conclave. The dim light of a flickering tallow candle made these two men look as though they were evil spirits.

"Well, Gregson, you have done your work well. How much are you coming down on me for? Don't be hard on a man, now," said Murker.

"Well, seeing it's you, I shall let you off easy with only five hundred dollars," answered Gregson.

"What?"

"Only five hundred dollars."

"Phew!" whistled Murker. "Altogether too much."

"I don't think so. You yourself acknowledge that the work was well done."

"Well, don't get excited about it. Here, take a glass of this brandy; it's just the thing to warm up the cockles of your heart this bitter night."

"Come, now, none of your tricks on me, Mart Hinkley, for I won't stand them."

"What do you mean by calling me Mart Hinkley?"

"Only a playful habit I have of addressing persons by their proper names."

"Well! That isn't mine."

"Isn't it? Perhaps you have got married and changed it."

"What the deuce are you talking about?"

"Since you seem to be so desirous for information, I don't mind telling you. I don't know what kind of a memory you are blessed with, but I do know that mine is a pretty good one. Some years back there lived a young girl who was the idol of her mother's heart, and it seemed mighty hard that a vile serpent should drag its slimy body into that abode of happiness. But the serpent had money, and having a wily tongue, made the girl think he was all he pretended to be. What was the end of it? There's a mother—who was never a wife—and a babe, whose father was a villain, lying in the graveyard."

"I am not accountable for her death. I saw her meet a man one night. She was faithless to me."

"Who was speaking about you? I thought your name was Archibald Murker."

"Pshaw! I said that but to try you."

"What a mighty good joke that is. Maybe you'd make a fortune on the stage, or in the circus-ring, although I scarcely imagine your witty sayings would please everybody. But, I will tell you one thing, and that is, Bessie Ashton was not unfaithful to Mark Hinckley. The man he saw her meet was her own brother."

"It is a lie."

"I swear it to be the solemn truth."

"She had no brother."

"She had, but you—I mean Mark Hinckley—knew not of his existence, for he was obliged to keep in hiding to save himself from prosecution for debts he had contracted, but which he was unable to pay."

"Again I say, a lie."

"And again I say it is the solemn truth. Mark Hinckley, villain that you are, look on me. For years I have prayed for this time to come, to get you once in my power. I have sworn an oath upon the Bible, while I knelt at my sister's grave, to have your life's blood. Beware the vengeance of Carlton Ashton!"

Murker, who had been trembling through this interview, arose to his feet. For the first time in his life he felt himself to be a coward, and would have made for the door, but a bullet from the pistol of his adversary brought him to the ground. He staggered to his feet, and with what strength he had left, drew a dagger, and drove it to the hilt into the heart of the man who was the brother of the girl he had so wronged.

The man fell dead without a groan.

The blood, flowing from the wounds of these two men, trickled underneath the door, and made red spots on the white snow.

Jessie heard the pistol-shot, and, in an agony of fright, screamed aloud. There were two voices sounding on the night air—a man's and a girl's. And both cried: "Murder!"

CHAPTER XII.

SUNSHINE THROUGH SHADOW.

THE doors of the house were burst open, and Henry, Pat, and a policeman made an entrance. A strange scene met their gaze—a scene to cause the blood to stagnate in the veins. The dead man lying on the floor, with his glassy eyes fixed upon the ceiling, while his murderer was fast approaching the world of shadows. The policeman strove to stanch his wounds and raised his head; his hour of death was drawing near, he knew.

Henry and Pat made their way to the chamber where Jessie was concealed and released her. The three then returned to the lower room.

"Murker, you have not long to live in this world; if you have aught to repent of, confess it now, and thus relieve your conscience," said Henry.

"Oh! I have loads to tell, if my life is but spared me," was Murker's answer.

The policeman opened his note-book and took down the confession. Hinckley told them that his name was not Murker, and also of the bad treatment of the girl named Bessie Ashton, and his murder of her brother.

"Years ago I fled my country, and arrived

in this land. My way led through a large forest. What to do and where to go, I scarcely knew. I had not gone a great way, when I beheld, lying on the ground, a ghastly skeleton. The clothes it had on were dropping to pieces. I looked them through, and found in them letters, notes, and a roll of bills. I found the name of the man to have been Archibald Murker. There was a small locket, which I opened, and my surprise knew no bounds when I found that one of the pictures was the very image of myself. I resolved that I would be Archibald Murker, and see what luck would have for me under a new title. Water, water!"

Murker had got to this part of his story when he was overtaken with great thirst, which was relieved by Henry giving him water.

A pause of a few moments, and Hinckley continued. He had but little more to tell. He had found nothing to come of the changing of his name, until he had arrived at the hut of the old woman, and read Mr. Atkins's letter, which was brought to her by Pat Doley. It all at once entered into his mind that he could make use of that letter, and with Jessie palmed off as his daughter, have a home with the Atkinses. His plans had fallen through in a measure, and what had they brought him to, but a miserable end? Passion had often urged him to do many a deed, as, for instance, the cutting of the trapeze rope, the abduction of Jessie, and his cruel treatment of her. Asking forgiveness of Henry and Jessie, and with a prayer—the first he had uttered for years—for pardon; the guilty man fell into that dark, mysterious river we all must cross, to meet—what?

The boys, with Jessie, left the policeman to look after the bodies while they proceeded to hunt up a coroner, whom they found, and who immediately went to hold an inquest.

It was now past midnight, and as they ascended the steps of Henry's boarding-house, they were surprised to see lights in the parlor. As they entered it they saw Mr. Atkins sitting there, together with a fine-looking stranger, a man who was the counterpart of Hinckley.

The boys told all that the reader is informed of.

Then came another startling discovery, at least to Jessie, for Mr. Atkins introduced the stranger to Jessie as her own father! His story was a most singular one.

"You will pardon me, my dear sir, I know, but did not the man who called himself Murker find all his proofs on the body of the skeleton? If the skeleton was not that of Jessie's father, how came the documents on it?" asked Henry.

"The night I left home, I went in search of work, and had secured a place as a porter in a store. On returning home, I was caught in the arms of some midnight ruffians, who seized everything of value I had. I was left for dead upon the wharf, stunned and unconscious. Some sailors, who had been out for a visit, in returning to their ship, espied me; and, thinking me to be under the influence of liquor, carried me on board, and placed me in one of their own hammocks.

"The next morning the ship set sail, with me on board. It seemed the sailors had been indulging in liquor too freely the previous night, and had forgotten about me. When I regained consciousness, I heard that the captain, seeing my injuries, had paid me every attention, as he saw in me one of his old schoolmates.

"We met no vessel coming home, whereby I could send a message, and, though I tried to bear my fate manfully and cheerfully, the thought of poor Lizzie caused me many a sorrowing hour. We had an old sailor aboard, who was always saying I had no faith in a Higher Power, or else I would not grieve. One night a terrible storm arose, and the vessel was in danger of going to pieces every moment. We all worked our bravest to save our lives. At last we perceived she was sinking, and had to take to the boats—there were two of them, but only one reached the shore, and that one carried the old sailor and myself. It was on an

island we found ourselves, and, after falling on our knees, and giving thanks for our deliverance, we looked about us, and discovered the place to be uninhabited.

"Having heard and read of persons subsisting in such a situation, we remembered the means they used, and profited by them. We were subjected to the changes of the weather a great deal, and suffered not a little."

"You were quite Robinson Crusoes," said Henry.

"Yes," answered Jessie's father; "but without the pleasures he had to render life endurable. To be sure, we had no savage foes to contend with; yet, the yearning to see home and the loved ones again, was preying on our spirits. The old sailor was the most cheerful of the two, but I seemed to rebel and thought my life could not be more wretched than it was. I soon got punished for my wicked repining.

"One morning, old Ben came into our hut, complaining of a faintness, and lay down on our bed. Toward afternoon, he got delirious and wandered in his mind. At sunset he became sane again, and, calling me to the bedside, said: 'Messmate, I am going to leave you. The captain, Death, is coming for me, and his orders are not to be disobeyed; a short voyage, and, maybe, if my life hasn't been too bad, I'll reach the heavenly port.'

"'Courage, Ben,' I whispered.

"'Ay, ay, sir,' and with these words, Ben passed away, just as the sun sunk behind the hill, and I was alone. Alone with the dead, in a far-off island—and here was my punishment. Hard as my lot had appeared before, it was now ten times worse to bear. I missed old Ben's voice and his kindly words. Sometimes I was even so wicked as to wish that I, too, had been taken away. The days passed away, solemnly and slowly, and as I went listlessly about my accustomed duties, I seemed to hear Ben's voice whispering in my ear. If I pined for home, he appeared to be telling me to bear up a little longer. This inspired me, and I resolved to be no more cast down, or allow myself to be despondent. If it was God's pleasure that I was to remain upon the island for my lifetime, I must submit to His will; but, if He saw fit to have me taken from it, He would do it in His own good time."

"Your story is a very wild one, and sounds like a novel," said Mr. Atkins.

"It is a true one; and, as I told you how I was punished for murmuring, I must now tell you how I was rewarded for my submission. One day, as I was reading over Ben's old scrap-book, I came to the passage: 'When you are in trouble, remember that the Lord will provide.' I looked up, and saw a vessel coming directly to the place where I was sitting. The captain, on hearing my story, was surprised. Taking me on board of his ship, we sailed for home.

"On the vessel was an old gentleman who was returning home from India, to spend the remainder of his days among his kindred and friends. On the voyage, which was a stormy one after I came on board, the old man was taken ill, and, as every one else was engaged in handling and taking care of the vessel during the storm, it devolved upon me to nurse and make the invalid as comfortable as might be.

"This I cheerfully did, waiting upon him day and night, administering his medicines, reading to him during the long days, and relating for his amusement the adventurous story of my shipwreck, and how I lived on the island.

"But all was to no purpose. The thread of the old man's life was run out; and one day, after being left alone with the captain and another passenger, who proved to be a lawyer, for several hours, he sent for me, bade me good-by, and in a few hours was dead.

"After the burial, the captain summoned me to the cabin, and displayed a will, by which I was made the sole heir to all the old man's wealth."

"And you have all this property?" said Jessie.

"Yes, all; but the dearest property I have now, is you, my darling girl. Would to Heaven your angel mother could have been spared to see this day."

"For that you must blame me," answered Mr. Atkins. "Had it not been for my selfish and foolish pride of caste, this might have been prevented."

But Jessie's father replied, "Let the dead past, bury its dead."

"The skeleton in the woods still remains a mystery to me," said Henry.

"And, until the last great day, must remain so. The only conclusion I can arrive at is this: The man who robbed me must have been going through the forest, when he was seized with a fit," answered Jessie's father.

"Faith! And I'd like to find a father wid a heap o' money," said Pat.

"Your kindness to Jessie must never be forgotten, and a home with me you shall always have," replied Mr. Murker.

"If I wasn't a youngster, and you wasn't the true gentleman that ye are, I'd be atther calling you a 'broth of a boy.'"

"Pat is a noble fellow, and it is to him that we owe Jessie's preservation," said Henry.

Mrs. Smart had her house full that night, and her guests were visited with calm and pleasant dreams.

The two men, whose lives had been so suddenly terminated, were buried the next day. Their lives had not been good ones, and we can, without a regret, dismiss them from the scene.

CHAPTER XIII.

EXTINGUISHING THE LIGHTS.

WHENCE this clapping!—whence these loud bravos? It is indeed a gala night, and the theater is crammed from floor to ceiling. It is the benefit and last appearance of the "Boy Clown." Yes, after to-night, he retires from his public life. Mr. Atkins has offered Henry a home, which has, this time, been accepted. Perhaps the knowledge that Jessie's father has purchased a plantation adjoining it, has had something to do with his decision.

The time had come for Henry's farewell speech, and as he was preparing to utter it the manager, in behalf of the company, presented him with a magnificent gold watch and chain.

"Kind friends," said the Boy Clown, "let me thank you, one and all, for your kindness. What is life, after all, but a circus-ring? We are continually striving for some great end. We leap over banners, either to fall on the ground of poverty, or land safely and firmly on the good stead, prosperity. As a circus must always have a clown, so must life have its jesters, and as John Owens says in 'Solon Shingle,' 'It's jest so!'"

The Boy Clown's task was over, and as he threw off his motley suit, he gave a sigh, as though he repented of what he was about to do. But, the thoughts of Jessie cheered him. He dressed and went in search of his party, who were waiting for him in front of the theater.

Early the next day Atkins, Murker, Jessie, Henry and Pat started for their Southern home. Pete and Dinah were the first to notice their arrival, and many were the bows and courtesies bestowed upon them. Mrs. Atkins had many a start of fright when she learned all that had happened, but she said she always did doubt Jessie's being Hinckley's daughter. There was a visit to the churchyard by all our group, and many a tear fell on the tombstone marked "Lizzie." Perhaps her spirit watched them and was pleased. Who can tell. Lizzie's life had been a sad one. Cast away from home, she had wandered with her child, until she reached the hut of the old woman, where she left the infant. She was made to believe that both her husband and her child were dead.

But why linger over these sad scenes? Lizzie

is in a happier land, where she will be joined by those she loved.

Pete and Dinah had a grand wedding, and Pete "clared to goodness dat he'd never tasted better fixin's to de geese or chickens," and "dat dem geese never had better hands laid on dem dan Miss Dinah's."

"Lor's, Pete, you make dis nigger vain, and vanity is a cryin' evil and a sin. Dem geese hain't got no feelin's, for if dey had I wouldn't be so cruel as to hurt dem," answered Dinah.

"Well, Dine, you didn't seem to keer how cruel you treated me once, when you 'fused to hab me."

"You oughter opened your testament and found consolidation (consolation) dere."

"So I did, Dine, so I did, but de good book said, 'it is not good for man to live alone,' and dat book allers speaks de trufe."

"Well, you's got me now, and you oughter be satisfied."

While they were dancing and feasting, a wagon drove up, driven by our friend the peddler. He had been traveling, and learning that his once-companions were staying at the Atkinses, had made them a call. He brought them the news of the death of the old woman who had the care of Jessie. Her "darter with the pension," was there, and endeavored to set her cap for the peddler, but he followed Sam Weller's advice, and "beware of the widders."

Our young Irish lad, Pat, worked on Mr. Murker's plantation, as he said he was "bound to airn his board."

One day, Henry received a letter from his former friend, Charles Morton, informing him of a severe illness. Henry at once wrote for them to come and make him a visit. He had not forgotten his midnight vigil.

"Ah! Charley," said Henry, as they were together. "I little thought that day when you told me to beware of Hinckley, so many ills and perils would surround me. Pat will insist that, as I have escaped from death so many times, I must have been born to be hung."

"I scarcely think his prophecy will turn out a true one. Perhaps Jessie is the one to hang, but it will be around your neck, and that kind of a chain you wouldn't mind."

Henry blushed.

"Why should you blush, Henry? Jessie is a good girl, and you are a good boy. You love her, and she—"

"Does she love me?"

"Of course, why should she not?"

"I've sometimes thought, since you have been here, that she came over to see you very often."

"Jealous, Henry? You have no need to be. She loves none but you, and I hope to get well enough to dance at your wedding. So you needn't let the green-eyed monster attack you again. She is an angel of sympathy and kindness. She feels friendship for me—nothing more; but it is love she has for you."

Charles was right. Young as they were, they had each deserved the other's love.

A little more to say, and our story is done.

Pete and Dinah are the jolliest couple out, and if you desire to see two sets of shining ivories, just get Henry to tell a few of his circus jokes to them (of course I mean the owners of the ivories). Pat is a great favorite on the plantation, and he has caused many an unmarried wench to fast on midsummer's eve, and at midnight lay a clean cloth, with bread and cheese and ale, sitting down as if going to eat, the street door being left open, solemnly assuring them that the person they were to marry will come into the room, and drink to them by bowing, afterward fill the glass, make another bow, and retire.

Charles is rapidly improving in health, and, at his own desire, will rejoin his circus. Mr. and Mrs. Atkins find in their son-in-law a noble and upright man, and proud of him they are, too. He is assiduous for their welfare, and his care of the grave of the dead Lizzie proves how he loved her.

Jessie is loved by all, especially by Henry.

And of the young gentleman who serves as

a title to these gathered threads? Does he not deserve a happy life? He has it now. But, in the future, he sees a vision of leading Jessie to the altar as his bride; and between you and me, kind reader, the vision will prove a true one. The Boy Clown's record is done! He has had many an adventure, and if the narrator has failed to depict his career as would an abler pen, be lenient and criticise not too harshly.

The circus is out.

Extinguish the lights!

THE END.

BEADLE'S Half-Dime Library.

- 1 DEADWOOD DICK, THE PRINCE OF THE ROAD. By Edward L. Wheeler 5c.
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